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THE NEW SCHOLARSHIP?[1]

Whatever may be lacking in American criticism, it is not variety any more than it is thoroughness or conviction. We have become accustomed to a heterogeneous assortment of 'New Critics' loosely ranged over against the academic Old Guard, and to a large number of individuals and groups whose positions are governed by different philosophical, psychological or sociological preconceptions. Professor Tuve does not seem to fit into any of these categories: she comes nearest, perhaps, to the Historians of Ideas, and she stands squarely for the control of criticism by scholarly information, but in the preface to her latest book she declines to consider herself at war with 'The New Criticism' 'except where it asks what-is-truth? and will not stay for an answer'. What this means in practice and how far it is significant that Professor Tuve's work should have been highly praised in this country by those not particularly sympathetic to modern critical methods it is the business of this review to consider.

The immediate occasion is her recent book on George Herbert, finely produced by Faber and embellished with seventeen plates (two coloured) illustrating mediaeval iconography. The chief aim is to show that Herbert worked deliberately and consciously within a tradition of symbolism and scriptural interpretation, going right back through mediaeval liturgy and devotional and expository literature to the beginnings of the Christian Church, that this raises special problems for criticism, and that in particular much of his imagery which has been seen as quaint or startling is in fact thoroughly conventional and can only be properly appreciated by a mind aware of the tradition. The book falls into two parts, an essay on ' "The Sacrifice" and modern criticism', starting from Mr. Empson's analytical pages in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, and a general section discussing 'images as language', wit, the interpretation of some obscure passages, and the significance of the 'Jordan' poems.

A fundamental issue is raised on p. 42, apropos 'the wilful modern divorce between "scholarship" and "criticism" ':

> 'I should like to speak out for willingness to repair our ignorances, despite the current fear (not least current among "academic" critics) that we may somehow substitute knowledge "about" poem and author for response to poetry. This *substitution*, which I admit to be deplorable, is far less frequent than the

[1] *A Reading of George Herbert*. By Rosemond Tuve (Faber & Faber, 25/-).
Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery. By Rosemond Tuve (U.S.A.: University of Chicago Press; U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 33/-, 1947).

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losses we sustain by the modern necessity to avoid any noticeable use of the helps furnished by literary scholarship *in case* (*sc.* "if") *criticism is one's end.* Revolt against the abuses of the former may have been necessary. But criticism may not longer decline to face the problems created by the fact that recognition of the richest and deepest meanings of poems sometimes depends about equally upon the knowledge and upon the sensibility of a reader. The fact operates as truly in the case of early poems as with those of Eliot and Yeats: there it has been recognized and valiantly met'.

General statements of this kind are slippery things to handle: one does not quite know who or what is really under fire. There may be excesses and errors of 'new critics' to justify this feeling that ignorant criticism does more harm than scholarly irrelevance, but Professor Tuve's optimism hardly allows for the many instances of scholarship used to support critical prejudices which remain unconscious or unacknowledged. In any case, I am not sure who advocates 'divorce': what we want is informed criticism and scholarship which answers genuine critical questions. But response to the deepest meaning of a poem is not absolutely the same thing as *recognition* of it, and even where Eliot and Yeats are concerned it is worth noting that exposition and exegesis sometimes permit an interest in underlying doctrines and systems in general forms to replace the response to their particular embodiment in the poems.

A major question here, and one relevant to all Professor Tuve's writing, is how far, where works of the past are concerned, we ought to try to turn ourselves into contemporary readers (bearing in mind that we can obviously never do so completely)? To say that this question is not so easy to answer as it may appear at first sight is not to assert the contrary extreme that we may find in a work of the past anything we can—may consider ourselves free, in fact, to re-make it entirely. But it has always been generally assumed that the greater works were precisely those with the power to speak to other ages than their own, and it might therefore be argued that the more exactly we succeed in reconstructing in ourselves the mind of a past age the greater the danger that we shall merely endorse the age's own critical values and blur our perception of the more lasting vitality. Clearly there must be compromise, adjustment and critical choice at every point: we start from where we are and what experience and information we possess: we correct continually by the acquisition of any knowledge that seems relevant, including that of the first readers' mental habits and the author's probable intention. But we should not forget that achievement may exceed as well as fall short of intention, and we are not bound to restrict ourselves to the conscious interpretations possible to contemporaries, since it would be unreasonable to suppose that *all* other meanings discovered by subsequent generations were simply anachronistic and not in some sense implicit from the start.

When, therefore, Professor Tuve asserts that we misinterpret Herbert through inadequate knowledge of the symbolic tradition

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governing his imagery, we are perhaps more ready to be impressed by her claims of what the knowledge will add to our understanding than her notions of what it ought to exclude, though we shall examine both critically. It must be said that in Mr. Empson's account of *The Sacrifice* in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* she chose a handy stick with which to beat modern criticism: its lapses of tone and its patches of irresponsible ingenuity would be acknowledged by most critics, New or otherwise, without any special equipment or learning. The analysis has nevertheless merits which she acknowledges fairly, and Mr. Empson, while admitting some faults and errors, has defended himself to some effect in a letter to the *Kenyon Review* for Autumn 1950 (XII, 735). Professor Tuve is mainly concerned to show that the poem derives from the liturgical office for Holy Week and belongs with the Complaints of Christ to his People, a large group of mediaeval religious lyrics. Its statement of conflicts, its ironical juxtapositions and its symbols, she says, are not Herbert's, but are prescribed by tradition, and she reinforces her point with a mass of parallels including M.S. illuminations and stained glass windows. Some of these are enlightening locally and all have general interest, though it is not clear that anything essential in the poem is likely to be missed by a reader normally familiar with the Bible and the Anglican prayer-book. To suggest that without these learned annotations we are lost is, I think, to ignore the extent to which a successful poem may embody and perpetuate a tradition, carrying it over with new life into a different age. Is there not also an opposite danger, especially where religious belief is concerned, that the reader too thoroughly saturated in a given tradition may tend to take the will for the deed, to distinguish insufficiently between conventional repetition and true re-embodiment? Since Professor Tuve recognizes that Herbert's originality lay in the way he used traditional thought, making new connexions to sharpen existing and inherent ironies and to 'reawaken into new life whole complexes of meaning', it is not easy to see why she denies the presence of new connotations in the imagery as part of the process. It would seem, for one thing, to be a normal method of the popular preacher to bring home conventional symbols to the imagination by giving them a touch of homely concreteness. Professor Tuve says that when in *The Agonie* Herbert says 'Sinne is that presse and vice . . .' he is using the conventional metaphor of the winepress of the Passion. 'He is not the daring Metaphysical innovator wittily joining the lowly press to the exalted idea of Christ, but the poet choosing familiar and moving language . . . .' But if the addition 'and vice' is not there to revivfy the symbol, bringing the properties of 'presse' more concretely to our imaginations (with a hint also of thumbscrews and torture) it is difficult to see why it is there at all, however many woodcuts and windows may depict as a type of Christ the bunch of grapes stolen by the Israelite spies. It is the same with other examples: in the anagram poem *Mary*: *Army* how can we be certain that Herbert would not have expected some of the common associations of 'pitch his tent' to

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occur to the reader, if only as stimulant of attention, whatever familiarity he may have counted on with the symbol of the Virgin as 'tabernacle of the Deity?' Even 'Man stole the fruit, but I must climbe the tree' seems to depend for *part* of the force of its antithesis on a connexion between 'fruit' and 'tree' which is *not* purely symbolic, though we do not need to follow Mr. Empson's suggestions all the way, or even, necessarily, to believe that the connotations are completely under control. Professor Tuve seldom seems to admit the possibility that the poet might miscalculate. Is there, one wonders, a traditional justification for the 'grave-clothes'-'handkerchief' conceit?

Perhaps the real point to make, however, is that scholarship, however thorough, cannot completely prove these points: it is a critical judgment that is in question, and there is room for disagreement. Professor Tuve claims that when we understand the symbolic language and exclude 'irrelevancies' the poems she analyses are transformed: I can only say that many of them do not seem to me to become all that much more effective. Not all readers, I think, will agree that the answer to rebellious protest in *The Bunch of Grapes* becomes 'as moving, once we grasp the symbolism, as the end of *The Collar*'. It may be significant that not very much is said about the best and most well-known poems: perhaps they have been able to make their impact in spite of our ignorance. In some cases Professor Tuve is able to clear up obscurities (the references, for example, to Joseph's coat and Solomon's 'sea of brass', which involve rather more than a knowledge of the Bible) but sometimes the obscurity which she seeks to illuminate, or the eccentric tone which she claims to remove by explanation appear to exist for her alone, or to be much exaggerated. In *Whitsunday*, for instance, the symbolism of light and life-giving water explains itself, and the image of the apostles as 'pipes of gold' works sufficiently well without the additional help of recognizing the source in Zechariah, iv (though we are naturally grateful for Hutchinson's note). The most difficult lines seem to be those describing the pipes as

> cut and martyr'd by the fault
> Of those who did themselves through their side wound

and here Professor Tuve has nothing to offer that we could not work out for ourselves. Incidentally she is silent on the earlier image in the poem about the stars coming down 'to know If they might mend their wages, and serve here': it would be interesting to know if any traditional symbolism can remove from this the connotation of servants bettering themselves (not that it matters). On other occasions, for example, the note on 'God help poore Kings' in *Church-musick*, the offered explanation seems no more adequate than any other excogitated gloss, unless one grants the assumption that an allusion, even without much point, is inherently more likely than a fanciful thought. As a matter of fact, there is considerable evidence that Professor Tuve is fascinated by the scholarly processes in themselves: her enthusiasm often seems to be the pleasure of the

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chase. This would not matter at all if one were not haunted by the vision of a literary world divided between New Critics ranging ever more widely in techniques of free association, and scholars insisting on the necessity of an ever-increasing burden of knowledge, with the common reader, if he still exists, distracted between them.

Many of the general qualities of Professor Tuve's comparatively short book on Herbert appear in her monumental study of imagery, which came out five years ago, and received some discussion in an exchange between Mr. Bewley and Mr. Donald Davie in *Scrutiny* for September, 1949 (XVI, 234). Bearing the sub-title 'Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-Century Critics', its main thesis is that all post-seventeenth-century criticism has been wrong in its account of Metaphysical poetry, whether favourably or unfavourably disposed, and in particular, that all modern attempts to distinguish Metaphysical from Elizabethan poetry largely in terms of its use of imagery have been wrong-headed and misleading. Professor Tuve argues that Renaissance critical theory, on the other hand, has been misunderstood and therefore under-estimated, and that it provides a much more useful basis for discussion of all poetry down to the Restoration. The book is divided into two parts: 'Sensuousness and Significancy as Functions of Images' and 'The Logical Functions of Imagery'. The first begins by dealing with the effect upon imagery of the Renaissance doctrines of Imitation (conceived as the author's ordered interpretation of nature expressed through deliberate artifice and a conscious attempt at the artistic statement of truth), '*ut pictura poesis*' (a desire for something like significant form rather than external ornament) and 'style as a garment' (in the sense that the flesh is the garment of the soul). It goes on to consider in turn various criteria for the use of images which may be derived from these general principles—sensuous vividness, delightfulness (including 'varying' and 'beautifying' as more than mere multiplication or elaboration), significancy (contribution to the expression of the poet's coherent ordering of nature), rhetorical efficacy, and the various types of decorum, especially according to the three levels of style and the different literary 'kinds'. The last chapter ascribes to decorum more importance than distinctions of schools or individuals, replacing the idea of a Metaphysical 'revolt' by a simple choice of certain 'kinds' to which the 'middle' and the 'low' style were appropriate, but which were well within the bounds permitted by contemporary theory. The second part discusses images according to their logical bases and logical functions, rejecting as useless the present tendency to class them according to 'the area from whence comparisons are drawn, because of personal predilections of the author'. It relates Renaissance imagery to Renaissance logical method, suggesting in particular that the rise of the new Ramist logic with its emphasis on dialectic, not merely for disputing or proving but as a means of investigating the nature of things, of intellectual probing, may have been the main influence towards that emphasis on certain kinds of poetic method, especially in the use of imagery, that we are accustomed to call Metaphysical.

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Professor Tuve, however, does not choose to press this point (perhaps her most interesting general conclusion) because the English poetic tradition seems to her 'so much of a piece from Marlowe (or Wyatt) to Marvell'.

Professor Tuve is a formidable scholar, as well as an energetic and ingenious controversialist: she presents this comprehensive argument with a tireless industry in multiplying distinctions, qualifications and examples which makes it very difficult for the critical reader to penetrate her defences, however much he may feel that something is going wrong. The most effective answer that I have yet seen deals mainly with her treatment of Donne, and is once more by Mr. Empson, in an article on *Donne and the Rhetorical Tradition* in the *Kenyon Review* for Autumn 1949 (XI, 571). Perhaps the first point to consider is that here again far too exclusive an importance seems to be attached to intention—to what the writer thought that he was doing and what the reader thought had been done, as deduced from evidence of current theory. Professor Tuve appears to abandon the possibility of any critical theory or method which could be applied equally to any poetry from the Renaissance onwards, though at times she seems to suggest that modern poetry can be fitted rather better into Renaissance categories than *vice versa*. Elsewhere, however, she says explicitly that she doesn't know whether Renaissance theory is true, only that it fits Renaissance poetry. She certainly succeeds in interpreting the theory to us as rather less naïve than has sometimes been assumed, but hardly, I think, as covering all the complexities with which modern criticism finds it necessary to deal, and, which as Mr. Empson points out, have always existed as practical problems for writers.

This focusing on intention and theory has the obvious danger of deflecting attention from the actual experience of and response to poetry. Professor Tuve has a logical acuteness which enables her in numerous instances to show that modern criticism has pointed to the wrong quality as the differentiating factor between an Elizabethan and a Metaphysical poem (frequently that differences ascribed to imagery really depend on other things). But she is more concerned to demonstrate the relevance of Renaissance theory to the common use of imagery than to point to the true *differentia*; the possibility that behind the inadequate modern analysis lay a genuine perception is forgotten or minimized, so that there seems to be often an implicit suggestion, without direct statement, that the perception was false. At the beginning of the book Professor Tuve urbanely claims to share modern tastes, to prefer seventeenth- to sixteenth-century poets, and to be dissatisfied merely with 'the *reasons why* so far advanced'. This, it must be said, does not altogether square with the general trend of the discussion, and as we have seen, when she does produce, in the influence of Ramist logic, something that might suggest from her point of view more adequate reasons, she soft-pedals the argument in the interests of a feeling that Renaissance poetry is all of a piece. Are we not

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justified in suspecting here a critical assumption masquerading as a disinterested conclusion from evidence? Granting for a moment that all the many examples of imagery used for similar purposes in Spenser and Donne, Drayton and Marvell can be accepted as convincing, we are still left with the plain fact that poems by Spenser and Drayton do not look like poems by Donne and Marvell (nor even do those of the Ramist, Sidney) and that this is important for criticism and even for literary history.[2]

At this point Professor Tuve refers us to 'decorum', the careful discrimination of 'kinds' and their appropriate styles. Decorum has perhaps been underestimated in the past, though there are a good many signs that it is coming into its own now especially as a means of undermining theories of stylistic development (*e.g.* in Shakespeare). Here it is argued that Donne and the Metaphysicals simply chose to write in short forms favouring concentration and in kinds demanding those middle and lower styles whose legitimacy for certain purposes had always been recognized. This, of course, is only to push the problem further back as Miss Bradbrook[3] and others have noted: it remains significant that at this time a number of writers became particularly interested in the opportunities offered by these kinds and styles. To imply that if Sidney and Spenser had Donne's 'causes' (a term covering both 'poet's intention' and 'poetic subject') they would have written like Donne simply gets us nowhere: to have had exactly Donne's 'causes' they would have had to be Donne. Professor Tuve seems to suggest that because the deliberate expression of personality was not a characteristic of Elizabethan poetry, personal differences count for little in the total effect—a *non-sequitur* if there ever was one.

Or perhaps she would say that here she is speaking particularly of imagery, and that personal differences of style come out in subtler matters of tone and rhythm. The whole tendency of her argument, of course, is to assert that imagery cannot be properly considered apart from its function in a controlling context. The point is sound enough, if not original, and undoubtedly modern criticism shows a number of excesses which make the reminder timely. But too narrow a concentration on imagery is ascribed to too many critics: Professor Tuve talks of 'Imagist theory' and 'Symbolist poetic' as if most modern criticism could be fitted quite simply into these categories. Not many modern critics demand 'vivid sensuous

[2]A typical example is the comparison between *Amoretti* XLVI and *The Definition of Love* on pp. 325-6. Differences in pace or verse form, it is said, should not lead to false antitheses regarding the nature of *images*. But the similar logical function of the images here seems a trivial matter beside the contrast in total effect, the so much greater force and concentration of the Marvell than the Spenser passage. Even if it is 'the formal patterns which give the two images their character' that difference of character remains the important thing.

[3]See her *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry*, p. 248, note 12.

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particularity' in quite the naïve way she suggests, nor can their demands be so easily connected with Romanticism. Speaking of the Elizabethan 'refusal to narrow the task of images to that of a truthful report of experience' on p. 42 she points out that Donne apostrophizes the personified universal even in Elegy XIX: *Going to Bed*. But this, of course, doesn't make the total effect of the poem less dramatic and concrete, and I don't know who wants to restrict images to 'truthful report of experience' in such a narrow sense. Often it seems to be missed that statements made by modern critics of the Metaphysicals refer to whole poems and passages, and that discussion of images is only a pointer to the main effect. Mr. Eliot's famous phrases, for example, about 'sensuous apprehension of thought' and the rest were *not* merely descriptions of imagery (see the subtle over-simplification of the summary on pp. 165-6) and it is not likely that the list of critics in the footnote to p. 164 would all subscribe without reserve to Professor Tuve's account of their common notions.

It would be possible to pursue Professor Tuve through discussion of particular examples to the extent of almost her own four hundred pages, but perhaps enough has been said to show her aim and method and the nature of the disagreements she provokes. It is only fair to say that the book contains many incidental discussions of considerable interest, and that she has certainly made some kinds of glibness about imagery impossible in future. To provoke more careful thought about the relation between Metaphysical and Elizabethan poetry is a service. Most of the critical rehabilitation of the Metaphysicals was accomplished against a background of conventional taste inherited from the nineteenth century: the main task was to break down Romantic prejudices against wit, conceits, and metrical irregularity. Less careful attention, perhaps, was paid to what differentiated the Metaphysicals from their predecessors, and something of the older conception of the Elizabethan age as romantic in the nineteenth century way, only more youthful and naïve, may have survived in some recent criticism. It will hardly, I think, be found in Mr. Eliot's essay, or in Sir Herbert Grierson's famous introduction, where the definition of 'Metaphysical' neither ignores the presence of wit and conceits in earlier poetry, nor concentrates narrowly on imagery. Whether a recognition of the conscious art, the philosophical, moral, and practical ends, and the intellectual qualities of Elizabethan poetry will lead us to find as much in common between Sidney, Spenser, Drayton, or Daniel and Donne, Herbert, King or Marvell as Professor Tuve does, is another matter.

R. G. Cox.

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REALITY AND SINCERITY:

NOTES IN THE ANALYSIS OF POETRY

(The following comes from an exercise in critical comparison involving three poems: Alexander Smith's *Barbara*, which is to be found in the *Oxford Book of English Verse*; Emily Brontë's *Cold in the earth*; and Hardy's *After a Journey*. The challenge was to establish an order of preference among these poems. But only two of them are seriously examined below.)

About which of the three poems should come lowest in order of preference there will be ready agreement. Alexander Smith's *Barbara* has all the vices that are to be feared when his theme is proposed, the theme of irreparable loss. It doesn't merely surrender to temptation; it goes straight for a sentimental debauch, an emotional wallowing, the alleged situation being only the show of an excuse for the indulgence, which is, with a kind of innocent shamelessness, sought for its own sake. If one wants a justification for invoking the term 'insincerity', one can point to the fact that the poem clearly *enjoys* its pang: to put it more strictly, the poem offers a luxurious enjoyment that, to be enjoyed, must be taken for the suffering of an unbearable sorrow. The cheapness of the sentimentality appears so immediately in the movement, the clichés of phrase and attitude, and the vaguenesses and unrealities of situation, that (except for the purposes of elementary demonstration) there would be no point in proceeding to detailed analysis: the use of the poem for present purposes is to serve as a foil to Emily Brontë's—which it does by the mere juxtaposition.

Its quality as foil to Emily Brontë's is plain at once. The emotional sweep of the movement, the declamatory plangency, of *Cold in the earth* might seem to represent dangerous temptations; but in responding to the effect of passionate intensity we register what impresses us as a controlling strength. It remains to be seen just what that is:

> Cold in the earth—and the deep snow piled above thee,
> Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!
> Have I forgot, my only Love, to love thee,
> Sever'd at last by Time's all-severing wave?
>
> Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover
> Over the mountains, on that northern shore,
> Resting their wings where heath and fern-leaves cover
> Thy noble heart for ever, ever more?
>
> Cold in the earth—and fifteen wild Decembers
> From these brown hills have melted into spring:
> Faithful, indeed, is the spirit that remembers
> After such years of change and suffering!

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Sweet Love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee,
While the world's tide is bearing me along;
Other desires and other hopes beset me,
Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong!

No later light has lighten'd up my heaven,
No second morn has ever shone for me;
All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given,
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.

But when the days of golden dreams had perish'd,
And even Despair was powerless to destroy;
Then did I learn how existence could be cherish'd,
Strengthen'd and fed without the aid of joy.

Then did I check the tears of useless passion—
Wean'd my young soul from yearning after thine;
Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten
Down to that tomb already more than mine.

And even yet, I dare not let it languish,
Dare not indulge in memory's rapturous pain;
Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,
How could I seek the empty world again?

The poem does unmistakably demand to be read in a plangent declamation; in, that is, a rendering that constitutes an overt assertion of emotional intensity. If we ask why, nevertheless, the dangers such an account might suggest don't seem at any point disturbingly present, we can observe for answer that what is said in stanza seven—

Then did I check the tears of useless passion

—is more than *said*; it represents an active principle that informs the poem and is there along with the plangency. We have it in the movement, in the tough prose rationality, the stating matter-of-factness of good sense, that seems to play against the dangerous running swell. It makes us take the suggestion that some strength corresponding to 'these brown hills', which do not themselves melt, underlies the poem. And we see an obvious hint at the nature of the strength in

Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,
Strengthen'd and fed without the aid of joy:

the suggestion that something quite opposed to the luxury of 'memory's rapturous pain' is being 'cherished' in the poem; that a resolute strength of will, espousing the bare prose 'existence', counters the run of emotion.

Cold in the earth, then, in its strong plangency, might reasonably be judged to be a notable achievement. I say this, however, in order to go on to judge that Hardy's *After a Journey* is a much rarer and finer thing, to be placed, as a poetic achievement, decidedly higher. I approach in this way because I have not, in fact, found

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that those who confidently place *Cold in the earth* above *Barbara* do, as a rule, judge *After a Journey* to be obviously superior to *Cold in the earth*, and yet, for such readers, the superiority can, I think, be demonstrated; that is, established to their satisfaction.

The difficulties, or conditions, that explain the failure of response on the part of intelligent readers lie largely, it would seem, in the nature of the superiority itself, though no doubt some stylistic oddities—what there is some excuse for seeing as such—play their part. Here is the poem:[1]

Hereto I come to view a voiceless ghost;
Whither, O whither will its whim now draw me?
Up the cliff, down, till I'm lonely, lost,
And the unseen waters' ejaculations awe me.
Where you will next be there's no knowing,
Facing round about me everywhere,
With your nut-coloured hair,
And gray eyes, and rose-flush coming and going.

Yes; I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;
Through the years, through the dead scenes I have tracked you;
What have you now found to say of our past—
Scanned across the dark space wherein I have lacked you?
Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division?
Things were not lastly as firstly well
With us twain, you tell?
But all's closed now, despite Time's derision.

I see what you are doing: you are leading me on
To the spots we knew when we haunted here together,
The waterfall, above which the mist-bow shone
At the then fair hour in the then fair weather,
And the cave just under, with a voice still so hollow
That it seems to call out to me from forty years ago,
When you were all aglow,
And not the thin ghost that I now frailly follow!

Ignorant of what there is flitting here to see,
The waked birds preen and the seals flop lazily,
Soon you will have, Dear, to vanish from me,
For the stars close their shutters, and the dawn whitens hazily.
Trust me, I mind not, though Life lours,
The bringing me here; nay, bring me here again!
I am just the same as when
Our days were a joy, and our paths through flowers.

A difference in manner and tone between Hardy's poem and the other two will have been observed at once: unlike them it is not declamatory. The point should in justice lead on to a positive

[1]Reprinted from *Collected Poems* by Thomas Hardy, by kind permission of the Trustees of the Hardy Estate and of Messrs. Macmillan and Co., Ltd.

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formulation, and this may not come as readily; certain stylistic characteristics that may at first strike the reader as oddities and clumsinesses tend to delay the recognition of the convincing intimate naturalness. It turns out, however, that the essential ethos of the manner is given in

Where you will next be there is no knowing . . .,

This intimacy we are at first inclined to describe as 'conversational', only to replace that adjective by 'self-communing' when we have recognized that, even when Hardy (and it is significant that we say 'Hardy') addresses the 'ghost' he is still addressing himself. And it shouldn't take long to recognize that the marked idiosyncrasy of idiom and diction going with the intimacy of tone achieves some striking precisions and felicities. Consider, for instance, the verb in

Facing round about me everywhere . . . .

There is nothing that strikes us as odd in that 'facing', but it is a use created for the occasion, and when we look into its unobtrusive naturalness it turns out to have a positive and 'inevitable' rightness, the analysis of which involves a precise account of the 'ghost's' status—which in its turn involves a precise account of the highly specific situation defined by the poem.

Then again, there is that noun in the fourth line which (I can testify) has offended readers not incapable of recognizing its felicity:

And the unseen waters' ejaculations awe me.

'Ejaculations' gives with vivid precision the sound that 'awes' Hardy: the slap of the waves on the rocky walls; the slap with its prolonging reverberant syllables—the hollow voice, in fact, that, in stanza three, 'seems to call out to me from forty years ago' (and the hollowness rings significantly through the poem).

In fact, the difference first presenting itself as an absence of declamatory manner and tone, examined, leads to the perception of positive characteristics—precisions of concrete realization, specificities, complexities—that justify the judgment I now advance: Hardy's poem, put side by side with Emily Brontë's, is seen to have a great advantage in *reality*. This term, of course, has to be given its due force by the analysis yet to be done—the analysis it sums up; but it provides the right pointer. And to invoke another term, more inescapably one to which a critic must try and give some useful force by appropriate and careful use, if he can contrive that: to say that Hardy's poem has an advantage in reality is to say (it will turn out) that it represents a profounder and completer sincerity.

Emily Brontë's poem is a striking one, but when we go back to it from Hardy's the contrast precipitates the judgement that, in it, she is dramatizing herself in a situation such as she has clearly not known in actual experience: what she offers is betrayingly less real. We find that we have declamatory generality—talking *about*—in contrast to Hardy's quiet presentment of specific fact and concrete circumstance; in contrast, that is, to detailed complexity

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evoking a total situation that, as merely evoked, carries its power and meaning in itself. Glancing back at Alexander Smith we can say that whereas in postulating the situation of *Barbara* (he can hardly be said to imagine it) he is seeking a licence for an emotional debauch, Emily Brontë conceives a situation in order to have the satisfaction of a disciplined imaginative exercise: the satisfaction of dramatizing herself in a tragic rôle—an attitude, nobly impressive, of sternly controlled passionate desolation.

The marks of the imaginative self-projection that is insufficiently informed by experience are there in the poem, and (especially with the aid of the contrast with Hardy) a duly perceptive reader could discern and describe them, without knowing the biographical fact. They are there in the noble (and, given the intimate offer of the theme, paradoxical) declamation, and in the accompanying generality, the absence of any convincing concreteness of a presented situation that speaks for itself. Locally we can put a finger on the significance of the declamatory mode in, for example, the last line of the first stanza:

Sever'd at last by Time's all-severing wave.

The imagery there, or the suggestion of it, is essentially rhetorical; the noble declamation, the impressive *saying*, provides the impressiveness, and when we consider the impressiveness critically we recognize that to respond to the declamatory mode *is* to be unexacting in respect of offered imagery: the unrealized rhetorical-verbal will receive a deference that cannot be critically justified. Time's 'wave' is of the order of cliché; prompted, it would seem, by 'grave', it makes as rime—and the closing rime of the stanza—a claim to strength that it certainly cannot sustain.

Turning back to *After a Journey* we may now look at the words in the first line that have made it (strange as that must seem when one has taken the poem) characteristic of Hardy's clumsiness. Actually it is characteristic of the supreme Hardy achievement, the poem in which what at first may look like clumsiness turns out, once the approach to the poem has been found, to be something very different—something supremely right. The vindication of the questioned details in the first line must be, then, in terms of what follows, and of the whole effect in which they have their part. Of 'hereto', the archaism that (in such a use) looks like a Hardy coinage, we need say little more than that it comes to look like one of those Hardy coinages which, in the great poems, cease to be anything but natural and inevitable. Its balanced slowness is precisely what was needed—as appears when we consider 'view', which, again, has been challenged as a perversity, one characteristically settled on by Hardy, it would seem, for the sake of a perverse alliteration with 'voiceless'.

But we cannot judge 'view' until we have realized just what is the nature of the 'ghost'. This should have been sufficiently established by the time we have come to the opening of the second stanza:

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Yes; I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;
Through the years, through the dead scenes, I have tracked you . . .

Prompted by these lines we are at first inclined to say that the journey has also been a journey through time. But an essential effect of the poem is to constate, with a sharp and full realization, that we *cannot* go back in time. The dimension of time dominates the poem; we feel it in the hollowness of the 'waters' ejaculations'—the voice of the 'cave just under', a voice that has more than a hollowness of here and now; 'it seems to call out to me from forty years ago'. It calls out here and now; but here and now it calls out from forty years ago. The dimension of time, the 'dark space', is in the voice itself, so starting in its immediacy, and, with the paradoxical duality of the experience, so annunciatory that the forty years ago from which it seems to call out is not, all the same, here and now, but forty years away. And memory, having 'tracked' the woman 'through the years, through the dead scenes', attains only a presence that is at the same time the absence felt more acutely. The reference to the time 'when we haunted here together' contains an implicit recognition of the different kind of 'haunting' represented by such presence as she has for him now, when their togetherness is so illusory. And by this point in the poem we know that the 'ghost', if an evanescent and impalpable thing, is in no ordinary sense a ghost.

We can now go back to the opening lines of the poem and judge fairly what it offers, and, having done that, tell how it demands to be read. 'View', we recognize, is no insensitive perversity; it is the word compelled by the intensely realized situation, and we feel it imposing itself on Hardy (and so on us) as right and irreplaceable: the seeing that memory will do (given success in its 'tracking') will be an intent dwelling of contemplation upon the object. And the object will be—again the word is, with a poised recognizing endorsement accepted when it comes—a 'voiceless' (it will be a one-sided meeting, and the voice will be the cave's) 'ghost': on this word, again after a kind of judicially recognizing pause, the reader's voice descends and rests, as on a kind of summing-up close to the sentence.

It will be seen, then, that to recognize the rightness of 'view' and 'voiceless' and give them their due value is to recognize the kind of rendering demanded by the line: a slow and deliberate 'Hereto I come', followed by judicial discovering and accepting rests on 'view' and 'voiceless', and the concluding tone for 'ghost' that makes it plain that no literal ghost is in question—so that the 'nut-coloured hair and gray eyes and rose-flush should bring no disconcerting surprise. Once the deliberate stock-taking poise of the opening line has been appreciated, the rest of the poem is safe against the kind of misreading that would give the movement a jaunty sing-song.

The self-communing tone is established in the first four lines, and there is no change when Hardy passes from the 'its' of the second line to the 'you' of the fifth. He remains 'lonely, lost' throughout

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the poem; that is not a state which is altered by his communion (if that is the word) with the 'ghost'. The loneliness and the desolation are far from being mitigated by the 'viewing' in memory; for the condition of the 'viewing' is Hardy's full realizing contemplation of the woman's irremediable absence—of the fact that she is dead.

There are two places in the poem where a difficulty of interpretation has been found. One of them is the last line of the second stanza:

> But all's closed now, despite Time's derision.

The last line doesn't mean: 'All's closed now, in spite of Time, or Time's derision, standing in the way of its being closed'. It isn't a simple, direct statement of fact. It conveys a quite complex attitude that entails a weighing of considerations against one another and leaves them in a kind of poise. The effect is: 'Well, anyway, all that's over now, the suffering of division, things not being firstly as lastly well—I recognize that, though what, of course, I find myself contemplating now is the mockery of time; it's Time's derision I'm left with'. There is certainly no simple, and no preponderant, consolation. In the 'all's closed now' there is an irony, to be registered in a kind of sigh. *'All's* closed', not only the suffering, though that, Hardy recognizes, is of course included. But the last word is with Time's derision; and the rendering of the closing phrase, 'despite Time's derision', makes a testing demand on the reader: the phrase must be spoken with a certain flatness of inflection—an absence of clinching effect, or of any suggestion of a sum worked out.

The other place is at the fourth line from the end of the poem:

> Trust me, I mind not, though life lours,
> The bringing me here...

Not to take the significance of that 'Trust me, I mind not' is to have failed to respond to the complexity of the total attitude, and to have failed to realize the rare kind of integrity the poem achieves. It is to miss the suggestion of paradoxical insistence, the intensity of directed feeling and will, in 'Nay, bring me here again'. For what in the bringing him here, he may be supposed to mind is not the arduousness, for an old man, of the long journey and the ramble by night. 'To bring me here', says Hardy, 'is to make me experience to the full the desolation and the pang—to give a sharp edge to the fact of Time's derision. But I don't mind—I more than don't mind: bring me here again! I hold to life, even though life as a total fact lours. The *real* for me, the focus of my affirmation, is the remembered realest thing, though to remember vividly is at the same time, inescapably, to embrace the utterness of loss'.

The rare integrity appears in the way in which the two aspects, the affirmation and the void, affect us as equal presences in the poem. Vacancy is evoked as an intensity of *absence* with a power that sends us for comparison to that other poem of the same years

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(1911-1913), *The Voice* ('Woman much missed'); but vacancy, we find, in the other poem prevails, setting off by contrast the astonishing way in which in this poem it does not. *After a Journey* closes on the affirmation. But if 'affirmation' is the word (and it seems to be a necessary one), it mustn't suggest anything rhetorical; the affirmation is dramatic in a quite other sense. The opposite of the rhetorical has its very observable manifestation in the opening of the stanza:

> Ignorant of what there is flitting here to see,
> The waked birds preen and the seals flop lazily,
> Soon you will have, Dear, to vanish from me,
> For the stars close their shutters, and the dawn whitens hazily.

No one who has responded perceptively to the mode established at the beginning of the poem would read this as a trivial sing-song, but it clearly doesn't lend itself to noble plangency. 'Flitting' and 'flop' are key words—and 'flop', while being so decidedly the reverse of noble, has at the same time a felicity of poetic strength: rendering the sound as it does with matter-of-fact precision and immediacy (there is no plangency about the resonance), it conveys both the emptiness and the quotidian ordinariness that are essential notes of the ethos with which the poem leaves us at the end. And 'the stars close their shutters' gives the right defining touch to Hardy's attitude towards the woman—to the spirit of his cult of memory. This spirit is manifested in the stars suggesting to him, and to us, as they disappear, not sublimities and the vault of heaven, but lamplit cottage windows—associations in key with his recollections of 'forty years ago'. The note is intimate—with the touch of humorous fancy, it is tenderly familiar and matter-of-fact. No alchemy of idealization, no suggestion of the transcendental, no nobly imaginative self-deceiving, attends on this devotion to the memory of a woman. It is the remembered as it was that Hardy is intent on. '*I* am just the same': that is the final stress. *She* is a 'thin ghost'—mattering only because she matters to *him*. It is astonishing how the peculiar reality of the remembered but non-existent is conveyed: vivid—

> nut-coloured hair,
> And gray eyes, and rose-flush

—and real enough to be addressed; yet at the same time 'flitting', a 'thin ghost'; never, that is, more than something recalled in memory, so that the address is never anything other than self-communing. It is the purest fidelity, the sincerest tribute to the actual woman. Hardy, with the subtlest and completest integrity, is intent on recapturing what *can* be recaptured of that which, with all his being, he judges to have been the supreme experience of life, the realest thing, the centre of value and meaning.

> The sense in which, though he now frailly follows, he is
> just the same as when
> Our days were a joy, and our paths through flowers

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has been, when the poem reaches this close, precisely defined, and his right to affirm it established beyond questioning. It is a poem that we recognize to have come directly out of life; it could, that is, have been written only by a man who had the experience of a life to remember back through. And recognizing that, we recognize the rare quality of the man who can say with that truth 'I am just the same', and the rare integrity that can so put the truth beyond question. It is a case in which we know from the art what the man was like; we can be sure, that is, what personal qualities we should have found to admire in Hardy if we could have known him.

F. R. LEAVIS.

REVALUATIONS (XVI):

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

'F. Cooper is a rare artist. He has been one of my masters. He is my constant companion'

—Conrad, Letter to Arthur Symons, 1908.

I.

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER is an important American novelist; but as one studies his work, and his place in the American tradition, his importance seems to centre less in particular artistic successes—although he has given us one or two masterpieces of a high order—than in a conception of the novel that was new when he wrote. It was, in fact, so new that even those practitioners like Cooper who were affected by it were unaware of a formal new conception at all. As we turn towards the huge mass of Cooper's writings, appearing on the surface at once so conventional in shape and ultimately so formless, we may well wonder if we shall be able to disengage any consciously held or practiced ideas about the novel that will differentiate Cooper from the dreary fictioneers who were his strict contemporaries. Cooper wrote too much. An abundant productivity is at best a mixed blessing for a novelist, and sometimes it carries the seeds of disaster for his final reputation. This is not to take one's stand on the snobbish view, popular in the 'twenties and 'thirties, that volumes few and slender were all that could legitimately be expected from a serious artist. It is to raise the question of the degree to which the disciplined artistic consciousness must inevitably place curbs on creative and imaginative facility. There can, of course, be no simple answer. The perfect total answer would involve, among a multitude of other things, a consideration of all the economic and social pressures which an age might direct against any artist. And there is always the imponderable question of the nature of any one individual talent. Others have written at least as copiously as Cooper—Dickens, for example. But it is doubtful if Dickens's writing would have gained

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in formal or intuitive clarity by being subjected to tighter disciplines or deeper thought—in short, by curtailing its abundance. Dickens's conception of character is, in the end, a static conception, and it is probable that his warm fertility of invention does a great deal to compensate us for the absence of any significant relation between character in his novels and dramatic action (as opposed to the obvious machinery of plot). It is with no intention of denigrating so great a genius that one observes his characters are related to the action of his novels in the same way that figures standing on an escalator are related to the motion that moves them. The characters are passive, the plot is in motion, and there is rarely any of that reciprocity between them out of which a pattern of true dramatic action grows. Nevertheless, the abundance of Dickens is something for which we are right to be grateful. We gain rather than lose by it, for he gives little indication that any amount of concentration or revision would have given us what we miss from his work. To make amends, he gives us what he can with lavish richness.

The case of Cooper is not so fortunate. He was not as great as Dickens, but he was a greater *kind* of artist, and abundance of productivity proved nearly fatal to his art. This is to say, Dickens's fertility of invention distracts us from his deficiencies so that, although to read one of his novels through becomes increasingly difficult with the years, we continue to go back to him for a dozen chapters or so with great frequency. His books, for us, are like those antiquated motor cars that tempted our fathers into the pleasant countryside on summer afternoons. The deceptive tune of the motor at the beginning of the journey lulls us from thinking of the breakdown that will almost certainly occur a few miles down the road. But in Cooper's case his genius plays, not along the mechanical periphery of the plot, but flashes—if it flashes at all—in the very heart of action. And Cooper understands action in terms that are singularly congenial to our own critical sensibility. It is sometimes said that Cooper ends in Hemingway. But the Cooper I propose to discuss in this essay begins with Jane Austen. The abundance of Cooper gives us nothing; it distracts us, not from his defects but from his essential virtues. Discrimination is indispensable when we read Cooper. To take up the earlier image, if Dickens is a mechanism likely to stall on a pleasure trip, Cooper is a trim, but badly over-loaded, sailing vessel, and we often have to jettison most of the cargo before we can reach harbour. There is no point in pretending that it isn't hard work. Sometimes it's rather frightful; and I believe that no one who has been through the bulk of the thirty-two long volumes that form the collected edition of his novels would be inclined to dispute it.

It has been convenient to speak of Dickens here; but Cooper is, of course, the American Scott. In Scott little discrimination is required. He's neither more nor less than entertaining—a mildly acceptable, take-it-or-leave-it proposition. But anyone with a serious critical interest in the novel cannot afford to neglect the best of Cooper. His place in the development of the novel as a serious

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art form is an important one, although it is not much—if at all—recognized. At bottom the American Scott was as little like Sir Walter as a man could well be; yet the superficial resemblances are so strong, and the benevolently smug condescension that applies the tag so persistent, that Cooper will probably never be able to escape the insidious reputation that places *The Deerslayer* beside, or below, *Ivanhoe* as a children's classic. And yet *The Deerslayer* is the greatest masterpiece of American literature before *The Scarlet Letter*, and it is as serious in its meaning.

In this first part of my essay I wish to discuss Cooper's conception of an action as the form of a novel. Later on, I shall offer a detailed analysis of *The Deerslayer* to illustrate my general statements here. It is a different conception from Scott's, which has relations with the picaresque eighteenth century novel, and which likes to follow the hair-raising trail of a charming young swashbuckler from adventure to adventure, the whole series of episodes finding its continuity through the characters and the mechanics of plot. Cooper also has his relations with this tradition, and the danger is that as one reads through so much that he should *not* have written, this may seem equally the pattern for him. But at his best, the most flagrant adventures are intrinsic parts of a developing moral theme, the whole of which becomes the form of the completed tale. Neither the characters nor their acts are extraneous to this theme, nor is the theme independent of the physical components of the story. For Cooper at his best, an action is the intensified motion of life in which the spiritual and moral faculties of men are no less engaged than their physical selves. Cooper writes adventure stories; but an adventure is only the conventional boundary of this motion of life, the stylistic or structural limits within which it presents itself to us in fictional form.

I said that Cooper begins with Jane Austen. It has been shown that Cooper's first novel, *Precaution*, is an imitation of *Persuasion*. It is not my intention to maintain here that *Precaution* is worth reading. It is hardly strange that this early, direct imitation of her failed to profit by her real achievement. But when Cooper moved onto his own territory, which was not the English drawing room, he instinctively profited by what was best in her example—by her ability to confer a moral dimension on an action, and to make that dimension the bright, bracing air in which the novel lived and found its form. We must always bear in mind, of course, that the importance of action for art is not whether it is violent or composed, but whether it is human or merely mechanical. The young Fabrice learns a good deal on the field of Waterloo, but in terms of human experience it is doubtful if he learns more than Emma Woodhouse in an English village. The scope, the glory, and the danger of an action are only deceptively played out on an external stage. Their significance for art, as for the human being, is enacted on the interior stage of self-awareness and knowledge.

To linger on Cooper's obligations to Jane Austen is to proceed at once to the differences. The nature of these differences may be

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conveniently suggested here by saying that Cooper also exhibits occasional accidental similarities to a novelist who wrote after him, and with whom I have never heard him compared—I mean Dostoevski.[1] In Jane Austen the field of dramatic action tends to be concentrated in the evolving consciousness of her heroines. In Cooper, physical violence is frequently a surgeon's probe that explores a moral question *outside* the consciousness of any one of his characters. For Cooper, action as a phenomenon of the physical world has a moral significance in its own right. It is this ability to deal with violent action that is both one of his finest marks as a writer, and a recurrent temptation to the simple narrative artist in him to decline from his highest level. Later on, in dealing with *The Deerslayer*, Cooper's skill in weaving a moral pattern from action will become apparent; but at this point, as an indication of the suggestive authority with which he can sketch, in a few bold strokes, the physical extremities of a given action, I should like to quote a passage from *The Water-Witch*. The dialogue, as usual with Cooper, is archaic; but on this score he is no worse than Melville, and at Cooper's best, the archaicism has the effect of stylistically confining the merely mechanical elements of plot and character. The men in the following passage are stranded on a raft at sea with little hope of rescue:

> 'Until the stern of the French frigate was seen retiring from the raft, those who were on it had not been fully sensible of the

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[1]For those to whom this juxtaposition does not seem convincing, I suggest that Cooper's Revolutionary novel, *Lionel Lincoln*, would be a good place to make the comparison, and particularly Chapters XXVI and XXVII, which record the death by smallpox of the idiot boy, Job. These chapters illustrate particularly well Cooper's ability to manipulate with dramatic effectiveness a great number of characters in a scene at once, all of them operating at high levels of emotional intensity; and they point towards both a fascination and pity for human misery and squalor that one doesn't ordinarily associate with Cooper. It has been remarked that *Lionel Lincoln* has a very Hawthornian tone long before Hawthorne authoritatively evoked it. That is true; but the accidental similarities with Dostoevski seem to me more revealing in defining the character of Cooper's imagination.

Despite Cooper's rigorous social and theological orthodoxy, which increased as he grew older, one is frequently aware in his writing of the imponderable character reality carried for him. The immensity of wilderness that stretches endlessly through so many of his novels is itself a symbol of this. One of his favourite devices is to shatter the primitive forest silence by causing some ancient oak or elm to collapse suddenly under its own weight of years and size. Only so loud a noise could disturb so ancient a stillness. The violence of Cooper's action, as he creates it in his novels, is sometimes rather like that. The imagination penetrates reality deepest,

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extreme danger of their situation. Hope had been strongly excited by the return of dawn; for while the shadows of night lay on the ocean, their situation resembled that of one who strove to pierce the obscurity of the future in order to obtain a presage of better fortunes. With the light had come the distant sail. As the day advanced the ship had approached, relinquished her search, and disappeared without a prospect of return.

'The stoutest heart among the group on the raft began to sink at the gloomy fate which now seemed inevitable.

' "Here is an evil omen!" whispered Ludlow, directing his companion's eyes to the dark and pointed fins of three or four sharks that were gliding above the service of the water, and in so fearful a proximity to their persons as to render their situation on the spars, over which the water was washing and retiring at each rise and fall of the waves, doubly dangerous. "The creature's instinct speaks ill for our hopes".

' "There is a belief among seamen, that these animals feel a secret impulse which directs them to their prey", returned the Skimmer; "but fortune may yet balk them; Rogerson," calling to one of his followers, "thy pockets are rarely wanting in a fisherman's tackle. Hast thou haply line and hook for these hungry miscreants? The question is getting narrowed to one in which the simplest philosophy is the wisest. When eat or to

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if at all, only through a violence of drama and character that stands at the farthest remove from Jane Austen. And it is here that one finds a valuable suggestiveness in considering for a moment, without pressing the comparison, Dostoevski.

Cooper was not always an accomplished creator of character, although his abilities in this line have been under-estimated. It is worth remarking here that he scored some of his most notable successes with aberrational types that, in a few cases, might have sprung from the pages of the Russian novelist. For example, in his first novel on an American theme, *The Spy*, in Chapter XXXII we are given a harrowing episode in which the leader of a gang of Skinners, those marauders who infested the country during the Revolution and committed all kinds of crimes under the guise of patriotism, is hanged in a deserted barn by a brutal officer of a band of Cow-boys—the opposite number of the Skinners on the British side—whom he has casually encountered in the countryside. The contrasting characters of these two men, the treacherous degeneracy of the Skinner, and the clod-like insensibility of the refugee officer, smoking his pipe as he searches for a beam from which to hang his prisoner, is done with an insight into the terrifying squalor of which the human personality is capable that inevitably evokes a comparison with the later Russian writer. *The Spy* is an uneven novel, but this episode is one of sheer genius. And as so often with the Russian novelist, although it is extraneous to the main action, the episode is one of those cameos of violence and psychological terror without which the novel would collapse in significance.

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be eaten is the mooted point, most men will decide for the former''.

'A hook of sufficient size was soon produced, and a line was quietly provided from some of the small cordage that still remained about the masts. A piece of leather torn from a spar answered for the bait, and the lure was thrown. Extreme hunger seemed to engross the voracious animals, who darted at the imaginary prey with the rapidity of lightning. The shock was so sudden and violent that the hapless mariner was drawn from his slippery and precarious footing into the sea. The whole passed with frightful and alarming rapidity. A common cry of horror was heard, and the last despairing glance of the falling man witnessed. The mutilated body floated for an instant in its blood, with the look of agony and terror still imprinted on the conscious countenance; at the next moment it had become food for the monsters of the sea.

'All had passed away, but the deep dye on the surface of the ocean. The gorged fish disappeared; but the dark spot remained near the immovable raft, as if placed there to warn the survivors of their fate'.

I have already referred to Cooper's sense of the imponderable nature of reality. There is an extraordinary quality about this passage that springs from this sense. If one went in for such phrases one might even say that the passage possessed an Homeric inscrutability; but perhaps a more modest description will suffice. The effectiveness arises, not only from the electrically vivid economy with which the tragedy is created before us, but in the way the horror is re-absorbed into the world of nature. Even within the brief compass of the quotation, Cooper suggests that world of nature to us—the darkness of night on the ocean, the return of dawn with its delusive promise of hope. The immensities of ocean, wilderness, and antarctic waste are always, in Cooper, a means of accenting the human situation. Usually he conceives this in a peculiarly personal way—the natural, impersonal immensity not overshadowing man, but purifying him and adding a lustre of dignity to his role by the very resistance it compels him to offer. But there is also a vein of something more austere in Cooper, and we glimpse it here. There is a classical irony in the way the Skimmer's philosophy—eat or be eaten—vindicates the shark. After the sudden violence, the cry of horror and the despairing glance, peace returns upon the scene; but it is symbolized by the gorged fish sinking, satisfied, into the ocean's depths, and by the spot of blood on the ocean's surface, which, like all memorials of vanished violence, accents the silence into which it survives. All seems justified by the returning equilibrium in nature. The stark conception of fate (it is almost Fate) that momentarily appears in the last line might have pleased Hardy; but while it is an element in Cooper's imagination, its importance lies in the fact that he refused it. I point to the quality here because this stoic mood of resignation and acceptance,

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common among men whose imaginations dwell, as Cooper's did, among natural vastnesses, generates in the American novelist a rigorous and unyielding resistance. This resistance does much to explain his predilection for great physical violence in his novels; and it helps us to understand how Cooper is able to express through actions that Scott would only have shaped into another tale of adventure significant intuitions into the moral nature of reality. But before leaving the above passage a word should be said of the superb technical skill with which Cooper catches the excitement of the scene. He leads us to the moment of crisis through a full circumstantial account of the surrounding details, and then, changing his timing with perfect dramatic precision, he seizes the salient points of the tragedy as the unnerved spectator himself might have taken them in, almost instantaneously. And then, the moment after the shock of violence, there is the resurgence of quiet again; an effective orchestration, on a very small stage, of turbulence and calm.

II

This remarkable ability to delineate the local details of action and violence is an important part of Cooper's greatness. But action conceived as the form of the novel—in any meaning, that is, that can be taken seriously—requires something more than a bravely sustained sense of derring-do. For Cooper, however deceptively the significance of an action may seem at times to reside in the turmoil and heady adventure, it usually resolves itself, ultimately, into a moral dilemma which the reader, even more than the protagonists, is invited to explore. No one has done justice to this quality in Cooper, because the dilemma is frequently presented in terms of a conventional novel of divided loyalties. This is true of his Revolutionary novels, two of which I shall speak of briefly here. But the divided loyalties, so convenient a framework for an adventure plot, are intimately associated with Cooper's awarenesses of the virtues and deficiencies of America. The drama of conflicting loyalties is deeply rooted in a moral ambiguity which, focused on the Revolutionary stage, has sometimes seemed too simple a matter to merit serious attention.

I have already mentioned Cooper's first novel on an American theme, *The Spy*. The pattern of which I am speaking is particularly accessible here. We are presented with a colonial family, the Whartons, who have withdrawn from New York at the beginning of the Revolution, and are making their home in Westchester county, the so-called neutral ground. Most of the action occurs in the neutral ground, and while one would not be justified in tracing specific symbolic implications, the fact does retain its significance for the imagination throughout the novel. The elder Mr. Wharton, a wealthy and cultivated, but somewhat simple-minded, colonial, refuses to make a choice between the English and the Americans. His son is a Captain in the British army, while of his two daughters, Sarah, the elder, favours the Crown; Frances, the Americans. The following scrap of dialogue establishes the situation out of

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which the action grows very clearly. Sarah, speaking first, addressing a distinguished stranger who has sought shelter for the night at their home in Westchester:

> ' "I do wish, with my father, that this cruel war was at an end, that we might return to our friends once more".
>
> ' "And you, Miss Frances, do you long as ardently for peace as your sister?"
>
> ' "On many accounts I do . . . but not at the expense of the rights of my countrymen".
>
> ' "Rights", repeated her sister impatiently; "whose rights can be stronger than those of a sovereign; and what duty is clearer than to obey those who have a natural right to command?" . . .
>
> ' "I gave you to understand, that my sister and myself differed in our political opinions; but we have an impartial umpire in my father, who loves his own countrymen, and loves the British, so sides with neither".'

Naturally Cooper is always with the Americans in the final choosing of sides, but in these novels of the Revolution, both the right and the wrong of the matter is in the heart of the actor, whether he be American or English. As the plot unfolds along the lines suggested, *The Spy* becomes a kind of debate in action between the American and British points of view, but it is not a debate that moves towards any simple solution. The conventional conflict of the plot is intimately associated with a deeper moral ambiguity which Cooper found in American experience, and the infusion of this deeper interest, even though sporadic in the Revolutionary novels, lends a fitful vitality to what otherwise might have been wholly mechanical. The most important character in *The Spy* is Harvey Birch, who gives the book its name. There is an oddity about his role and character that makes him appear as a kind of emblematic projection of Cooper's own inner conflicts and tensions. Harvey is Washington's favourite spy—an American spy who functions by posing as a British spy among the Americans. Of the Americans, Washington himself is the only one who realizes that Harvey Birch, hated by his own countrymen as a traitor worthy of the gallows, is a great hero—if the truth were only known. But apparently the truth can never be known, for in his final interview with the Commander-in-Chief, Washington says to him:

> ' "Our situations are different; I am known as the leader of armies—but you must descend into the grave with the reputation of a foe to your native land. Remember that the veil which conceals your true character cannot be raised in years—perhaps never".'

Cooper, who in time popularly came to be considered a foe of America, or at least of her social institutions, was quite capable of forecasting his own role here. Considering his temperament and the avidity with which he seems to have sought personal unpopu-

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larity, very little of the spirit of prophecy would have been required. But the interesting thing about Harvey Birch is that he seems almost wholly composed of ambiguities wrapped around his inner dedication to the cause of America. And the nature of these ambiguities qualifies the nature of his patriotism. He is called 'the spy of the neutral ground', and perhaps the term is more apposite than American would be. Cooper has been criticized for not permitting Harvey's true identity to be made known at the close of the Revolution, but the very essence of his identity consists in the ambiguity of his position. He is a kind of ritual character moving between the American and the British lines, and symbolizing by his own long, dedicated life of suffering and revilement at the hands of his countrymen the fate of those patriotic and disinterested Americans who (Cooper seems to be saying) in other capacities than that of a spy, have also occasionally brought useful information from the British into the United States. In a sense, the benevolent and misunderstood Harvey, who labours as dangerously for the welfare of the good royalist characters in the book as he does for the good republicans, is a channel of communication between two points of view. It is not my contention that this aspect of Harvey Birch is effectively suggested or developed in *The Spy*, but it does hover perceptibly in the background, and it is responsible for most of the interest the novel still has. It is the multiple ambiguity of Harvey's role that points, if ever so faintly, towards a deeper level of interest.

Moving now to a much later and less well known novel, *Wyandotté*, published in 1843, one sees the same pattern of action and conflict evolving—but more subtly, for *Wyandotté* is a much better novel. Replacing Mr. Wharton in this novel is Captain Willoughby, retired from the British army, and living on a large frontier estate. Like Mr. Wharton, Captain Willoughby has a son who is an officer in the British army in America, and a daughter who marries an American officer. Captain Willoughby himself, while a man of stronger character than Mr. Wharton, is given to the same indecisions. 'The difficulty . . .', he remarks, in summing up his state of mind, 'is to know which *is* one's country. It is a family quarrel, at the best, and it will hardly do to talk about foreigners at all'. Captain Willoughby's closest friend is the Anglican clergyman, Mr. Woods, who tends to favour the American side in the Revolution, whereas the Captain, at least in his arguments with the priest, favours the British. The following passage is worth quoting because it focuses very sharply Cooper's conception of the Revolutionary struggle as a continuing debate between two points of view for which he was not prepared—except in the specifically political sense—to serve up a hard and fast solution. The passage occurs at the breakfast table the morning after a particularly protracted argument between Captain Willoughby and the chaplain on the merits of the Revolution:

> 'The parties mentioned entered the room in the order named; the usual salutations followed, and all took their seats at table.

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Captain Willoughby was silent and thoughtful at first, leaving his son to rattle on in a way that betokened care, in his view of the matter, quite as much as it betokened light-heartedness in those of his mothers and sisters. The chaplain was rather more communicative than his friend; but he, too, seemed restless, and desirous of arriving at some point that was not likely to come uppermost in such a family party. At length the impulses of Mr. Woods got the better of his discretion even, and he could conceal his thoughts no longer.

'"Captain Willoughby", he said, in a sort of apologetic, and yet simple and natural manner, "I have done little since we parted, seven hours since, but think of the matter under discussion".

'"If you have, my dear Woods, there has been a strong sympathy between us; I have scarcely slept. I may say I have thought of nothing else myself, and am glad you have broached the subject again".

'"I was about to say, my worthy sir, that reflection and my pillow, and your sound and admirable arguments, have produced an entire change in my sentiments. I think now altogether with you".

'"The devil you do, Woods!" cried the Captain, looking up from his bit of dry toast in astonishment. "Why, my dear fellow—this is odd—excessively odd, if the truth must be said. To own the real state of the case, chaplain, you have won *me* over, and I was just about to make proper acknowledgements of your victory".'

This is intended for a touch of comedy; but it does indicate the spirit in which Cooper wrote these novels. They are not only an outward record of the Revolutionary struggle; they are also a dialectic between opposing sides, with the answer held in suspension. Cooper's fine description of the Battle of Bunker Hill in *Lionel Lincoln* is written with a sympathetic emphasis on the British point of view, and it is worth remembering that in that novel, as indeed in *Wyandotté*, the principal characters solve their dilemma by returning to the Mother Country in the end, and leading very graceful upper-class lives. The martial conflict in these novels moves inevitably towards a concern with the related cultural conflict, and this Cooper was to make the subject of another series of his novels. But the pressure of this other, and more serious, interest is felt—even if faintly—behind the episodic action of the Revolutionary fiction, and it suggests an interest that we do not find in the more superficially polished writing of Scott. It permits an effective infusion of the personal. The Revolutionary novel in the hands of Cooper is an early fore-runner of the American international novel, and in it we can study the American sensibility in the process of formulating one of its most characteristic expressions. Although I have been able barely to touch on these novels here, it may be sufficient to suggest the way in which Cooper confers a new formal significance on action by rooting it firmly in a personally

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felt moral dilemma or problem. In the Revolutionary novels, the moral dilemma gives rise to, and controls, the dramatic action. It is the principle of cohesion among the scattered episodes which, without it, would merely range themselves in long and rambling narratives of random adventure.

III

I have been speaking of a certain moral ambiguity in Cooper's relation with America. It is a characteristic—this dual role of simultaneously championing America as the true home of political virtue while shuddering more or less obtrusively at her cultural deficiencies—of the most serious prose writers in America in the nineteenth century. This ambiguity of vision and valuation produced a high degree of detachment in these artists, and they used it effectively in their work. In Cooper, to whom the mechanics of plot meant more than to the others, we find this detachment manifesting itself in a curious and recurrent way. Cooper loved to use disguises—to superimpose one identity and one role over another in a single character. We have noted the ambiguous double role of Harvey Birch here, but it is a rare novel in Cooper in which someone doesn't turn up in masquerade, wearing false hair, a false name, a false accent, or even passing off as a member of the other sex. In Cooper, the 'restless analyst' is quite likely to deliver his penetrating social criticism from behind the protection of a fake beard. This taste for disguise and the double identity is partly explained by the demands of the kind of plot Cooper favoured—but not entirely so. It helped to maintain that distance between himself and the American matter that is the substance of his novels—a distance that he found psychologically indispensable for the exercise of his critical judgement. Instead of expatriating himself in a foreign country, Cooper found it just as satisfactory to dress up like a foreigner on home territory.

In 1828 Cooper published *The Travelling Bachelor: or Notions of the Americans*. It is occasionally a dull book, but nonetheless it is an extremely brilliant manual of social criticism on the America of that decade. It certainly deserves to be kept in print, which, of course, it isn't. The book is written in the first person, in the form of a series of letters. But Cooper chooses to speak in the role of an intelligent and sympathetic European seeing the country for the first time. Before visiting the United States, this young man makes a friend of an American whom he meets on the continent, and who is somewhat unnecessarily named Cadwallader. Cadwallader is Cooper's idea of the *good* American, and the description of him is worth quoting because it shows how near, even at this early date, the ideal was to its definitive expression in the later novels of James:

> 'On the road between Moscow and Warsaw, I encountered a traveller from the states of North America. He was about to end a long pilgrimage, in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and to return eager as a discharged Swiss, to the haunts of his youth, in the

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other hemisphere. He appeared like one who was wearied with the selfishness, struggles, and factitious distinctions of our eastern regions. Truly, there was something so naif, and yet so instructed—so much that was intellectual, and withal, so simple—a little that was proud, blended with something philosophical, in the temperament and manner of this western voyager, that he came over my fancy with the freshness of those evening breezes, for which you will shortly be panting, on the shores of the Dardanelles'.

Here we have an early portrait of the American conception of the virtuous, cultivated American that was to be fully rounded out by James. It is characteristic of these fictional Americans that although they always manage to live in Europe, they are always panting to return to the scenes of their youth, and Cooper's Americans are no exception. In one of Cooper's late novels, *The Redskins*, published in 1846, we are given an overblown description of one of these pre-Jamesian ex-patriots. Mr. Hugh Roger Littlepage, being endowed with a very ample estate, which has increased steadily as property values have risen through several generations in, and around, New York, has passed twenty of his fifty-nine years off the American continent:

'Mr. Hugh Roger Littlepage, senior, then, had a system of his own, in the way of aiding the scales to fall from American eyes, by means of seeing more clearly than one does, or can, at home, let him belong where he may, and in clearing the specks of provincialism from off the diamond of republican water. He had already seen enough to ascertain that while "our country", as this blessed nation is very apt on all occasions, appropriate or not, to be called by all who belong to it, as well as by a good many who do not, could teach a great deal to the old world, there was a possibility—just a *possibility*, remark, is my word—that it might also learn a little . . . .

'My Uncle Ro was fond of Paris, and he had actually become the owner of a small hotel in the faubourg, in which he retained a handsome furnished apartment for his own use. The remainder of the house was let to personal tenants; but the whole of the first floor, and of the *entresol*, remained in his hands. As a special favor, he would allow some American family to occupy even his own apartments—or rather *appartement*, for the words are not exactly synonymous—when he intended to be absent for a term exceeding six months, using the money thus obtained in keeping the furniture in repair; and his handsome suite of rooms, including a *salon*, *salle à manger*, *antichambre cabinet*, several *chambres à coucher*, and a boudoir—yes, a male *boudoir*! for so he affected to call it—in a condition to please even his fastidiousness'.

There is no use in pretending that Uncle Ro's fastidiousness isn't hard to take; but even those twenty years in Europe and the elegant Parisian boudoir can't prevent him from returning

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enthusiastically to his native country to confer on the Republic the blessings of his greater refinement. It is typical of the worst in Cooper (although the worst is usually amusing) that he causes Mr. Littlepage, the better to observe American *mores* after so long an absence, to disguise himself as a German pedlar, impressively bewigged and formidably equipped with an immigrant's accent, which Cooper painstakingly spells out. And so we see, not how Cooper faintly adumbrated the international but patriotic American as developed by James, but how he created a caricature that it took all of James's art to soften. James did not invent the type represented by his cultivated Americans in Europe. He found them already dusty and badly battered on the work shelves of American fiction when he began to write.

What is important in remarking these resemblances, however, is a fundamental similarity in Cooper's sense of American deficiencies that we find in James. We are all familiar with James's famous description from his *Hawthorne* of what America lacked in the way of social and cultivated amenities that were at the ready disposal of the European novelist. To return for a moment to *The Travelling Bachelor*, this description of the deprivations facing the American novelist shows a remarkable resemblance to James's list, and an almost identical conception of American cultural poverty, at least as far as the artist is concerned:

> 'The second obstacle against which American literature has to contend, is in the poverty of the materials. There is scarcely one which contributes to the wealth of the author, that is found, here, in veins as rich as in Europe. There are no annals for the historians; no follies (beyond the most vulgar and commonplace) for the satirist; no manners for the dramatist; no obscure fictions for the writer of romance; no gross and hardy offenses against decorum for the moralist; nor any of the rich artificial auxiliaries of poetry. The weakest hand can extract a spark from the flint, but it would baffle the strength of a giant to attempt kindling a flame with a pudding stone. I very well know that there are theorists who assume that the society and institutions of this country are, or ought to be, particularly favourable to novelties and variety. But the experience of one month, in these states, is sufficient, to show any observant man the falsity of their position . . . . I have never seen a nation so much alike in my life as the people of the United States, and what is more, they are not only like each other, but they are remarkably like that which common sense tells them they ought to resemble . . . In short, it is not possible to conceive a state of society in which more of the attributes of plain good sense, or fewer of the artificial absurdities of life, are to be found, than here. There is no costume for the peasant (there is scarcely a peasant at all), no wig for the judge, no baton for the general, no diadem for the chief magistrate. The darkest ages of their history are illuminated by the light of truth; the utmost efforts of their

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chivalry are limited by the laws of God; and even the deeds of their sages and heroes are to be sung in a language that would differ but little from a version of the ten commandments.'

In the passages that I have been quoting here we are able to recognize the germs of the international novel. We are confronted by that deeply-rooted ambivalence of feeling about American customs and institutions—the ardent patriotism qualified by a persistent restlessness in the presence of republican plainness that sometimes looks a little like radical distaste. And, especially, there is the international American himself, the AMERICAN GENTLEMAN rampant on a field of mid-Atlantic blue. To revert for a moment to the first part of this essay, it is perhaps clearer by this time how the drama of divided loyalties in the Revolutionary struggle was associated in Cooper's imagination with this deeper kind of ambiguity. But the Revolutionary novels, while a step in the direction of the international novel, were yet a form to themselves. Cooper, however, wrote several novels that, in formal structure, more nearly approach the characteristic pattern as it was to be developed later. The essential note of the international novel is that it provides a stage on which the American and European cultures dramatically encounter, criticize, and possibly supplement each other. There is a sense—a very good sense—in which *The Europeans* is as much of an international novel as *The Ambassadors*, although the action all takes place in New England. In 1838 Cooper published two long novels, *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* (the latter published in England under the name of *Eve Effingham*). These two novels, the second being a continuation of the first, relate the return to America, after many years abroad, of Edward Effingham, his daughter Eve, and Edward's caustic brother, John Effingham. Theoretically, the Effingham patriotism is exalted and pure. If, on the evidence of their conduct in the novels, it doesn't induce them to think well of their country, it enables them to think very well of themselves. Eve Effingham is one of those American princesses of whom we hear more later when Milly Theale goes to Europe; and in Cooper's candid account of Eve's idea of her own birthright as an American, we can see why James's title for Milly has always been popular with Milly's countrymen:

'Eve actually fancied that the position of an American gentleman might really become, nay, that it *ought* to be the highest of all human stations short of that of sovereigns. Such a man had no social superior, with the exception of those who actually ruled, in her eyes, and this fact she conceived rendered him more than noble, as nobility is usually graduated. She had been accustomed to seeing her father and John Effingham moving in the best circles of Europe, respected for their information and independence, undistinguished by their manners, admired for their personal appearance, manly, courteous, and of noble bearing and principles, if not set apart from the rest of mankind by an

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arbitrary rule connected with rank. Rich, and possessing all the habits that properly mark refinement, of gentle extraction, of liberal attainments, walking abroad in the dignity of manhood, and with none between them and the Deity, Eve had learned to regard the gentlemen of her race as the equals in station of any of their European associates, and as the superiors of most, in everything that is necessary to true distinction'.

Perhaps it should be emphasized that Cooper is not, even implicitly, critical of Eve's attitude. It is *his* position as well as hers. When we compare this passage, and, indeed, the whole conception and conduct of the Effingham family, with the pages of bitter social criticism against American manners and institutions (much of it devastatingly correct, but all of it delivered with an unpleasant unction, and with a rudeness that amounts to boorishness) we are squarely confronted by the paradox that has confused so many readers of American international novels, and particularly of James. Where so much animus seems to exist against the surfaces of American life, doesn't it, *shouldn't* it, indicate a rooted dislike for America herself? Exactly the opposite, of course, is true. There are obvious social and psychological explanations for this apparent contradiction, and they need not be regarded as inadequate in themselves. But the paradox has an infinite charm, for there are a variety of ways in which it can be intricately explained and understood, in the course of which we should have to bring most of the currents of American thought under review, and particularly the political background. Such an analytic breakdown of the paradox would show that this apparent contradiction in the American international novel is not merely the result of a yen for Europe on the part of a few talented, or eccentric Americans, but an historical tension at the deepest level of the American sensibility. However, the present essay is not a suitable stage for such an ambitious undertaking. In the space that remains I propose to justify the attention I have already given to Cooper by discussing his greatest masterpiece, *The Deerslayer*. In this novel, Cooper resolves the paradox we have been discussing—but he does so by inadvertence, as it were. Natty Bumppo, not Edward Effingham, is Cooper's only complete triumph in the field of American gentlemen. And Natty is a gentleman of the wilderness who can't even read. Nevertheless, he deserves all the fine things that Eve Effingham thinks about her father and uncle, who do not deserve them. Natty resembles the Effinghams in a distaste for American civilization: whenever he hears those heralds of the settlements, the woodchoppers, moving deeper into the wilderness, Natty himself goes farther west. But Natty possesses in a wonderfully civilized degree what the Effinghams never learned while moving in the best circles of Europe: tact. But then Natty can lay claim to his own peculiar advantages: he was educated by the Indians. [He was also influenced by the Moravian Brethren, a sect similar to the Quakers, whose views are implicit in Natty's philosophy.]

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IV

The five Leatherstocking novels of Cooper are, as a group, his greatest work. They were composed at long intervals across his active career, *The Pioneers* appearing in 1823, while the last of the series, *The Deerslayer*, was not published until 1841. The continuity in these novels is provided by the character of Leatherstocking himself—the hunter, Natty Bumppo; but the novels do not record a consistent chronological record of Natty's life. He is an old man in the first; he dies in the third novel, *The Prairie*; while in *The Deerslayer*, in which the conception of Natty's character is fully matured, he is a young man on his first warpath. *The Deerslayer* is the best thing Cooper ever wrote, and it is one of the great masterpieces of American literature. We see his conception of an action as the form of a novel—that conception which we have already discussed, and examined analytically in a number of his secondary novels—perfectly realized here in his art.

The action of *The Deerslayer* takes place at the beginning of the French and Indian War, but the adventures it records are only indirectly associated with that struggle. The novel opens, as so often with Cooper, with a vision of the American forest:

> 'Whatever may be the changes produced by man, the eternal round of the seasons is unbroken. Summer and winter, seedtime and harvest, return in their stated order, with a sublime precision, affording to man one of the noblest of all occasions he enjoys of proving the high powers of his far-reaching mind, in compassing the laws that control their exact uniformity, and in calculating their never-ending revolutions. Centuries of summer suns had warmed the tops of the same noble oaks and pines, sending their heats even to their tenacious roots, when voices were heard calling to each other, in the depths of the forest, of which the leafy surface lay bathed in the brilliant light of a cloudless day in June, while the trunks of the trees rose in gloomy grandeur in the shades beneath. The calls were in different tones, evidently proceeding from two men who had lost their way, and were searching in different directions for their path'.

The Deerslayer has its specifically-dated action, but we do not need to know it, for this is a kind of moral parable that is out of time altogether. All we need to know is that centuries of summer suns had warmed the oaks and pines when two men called to each other in the forest, "two men who had lost their way, and were searching in different directions for their path". We shall not be portentous if we bring a maximum of meaning to this line. When the two men emerge from the forest into a little clearing we are face to face with the handsome hunter, Hurry Harry, and his companion, Deerslayer, who is Natty Bumppo as a young man in his early twenties. In the long novel that here opens we begin to trace, beyond the pattern of violent physical action, two opposing moral visions of life which are embodied in these two woodsmen. This is the true form and drama of *The Deerslayer*, which is played

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out behind the screen of Indian attack and ambuscade—played out on a stage almost classically circumscribed, and over a period of only several days. These severe limits of place and duration impart a unity to the novel that, despite the incidents, which are more than usually densely gathered for Cooper, gives a prominence to the moral theme and deeper meaning. Deerslayer's values are not only defined through the action, their influence becomes the diffused atmosphere that the others breathe. They do not exist as a separable commentary on the action: they are in the heart of the action itself.

But as *The Deerslayer* is no longer inevitably read, even by children, my comments may be more intelligible if I offer a brief résumé of the story—or, at least, of the situation at the beginning. Reduced to bare plot proportions, it is nothing more than a somewhat exaggerated adventure tale. Deerslayer has lived with, and been educated by, the Delawares, a tribe of Indians for whom Cooper always showed a special fondness. Among the Delawares his particular friend has been the handsome and noble young chief, Chingachgook, betrothed to the loveliest of Delaware maidens, Wah-ta!-Wah, the Wild Rose. Before the story opens, Wah-ta!-Wah, coveted for her beauty by many young braves, has been kidnapped by Briarthorne, a traitor to his tribe, and carried into the remoter wilderness where a hunting expedition of Hurons, or Mingos, are encamped on the shores of the Glimmerglass (Lake Otsego in the Colony of New York). The Hurons, friendly to the French, have travelled this far from the Canadas, and, in their present encampment are trespassing on English territory, although the remoteness of the spot enables them to do so with impunity. Chingachgook, learning that Wah-ta!-Wah has been carried here, makes an engagement with his friend, Deerslayer, to undertake the rescue of his betrothed—and the two are to meet, at a certain time, by a certain rock, on the shores of the Glimmerglass. It is while travelling to keep this meeting that Deerslayer meets Hurry Harry in the wilderness. The two have known each other before, and as Hurry is also headed for the Glimmerglass, the two join forces. The purpose of Hurry's expedition is to visit a family that lives in this isolated place—Tom Hutter, and his two daughters, the beautiful Judith, and Hetty, her mentally enfeebled sister. Or rather, Hurry's real reason is to visit Judith, for despite Judith's reputed indiscretions with the officers of an English garrison a day's march away in the wilderness, Hurry is infatuated with Judith's beauty, and wishes to marry her. The Hutter family (with the exception of Hetty, who becomes a bore) is very well done. Cooper was always at his best when creating rather sinister old men; and Tom Hutter, who has withdrawn to the wilderness because of a price on his head for piracy, compares favourably with Aaron Thousandacres in *The Chainbearer*, and with Ishmael Bush in *The Prairie*. For the sake of security against Indian attacks, Tom Hutter has built a log house, referred to as the Castle, on piles near the middle of the lake; and for additional security and convenience, he has con-

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structed a large, flat-bottomed boat, called the *ark*, in which he and his daughters live during the summer. The ark and the castle, with occasional sojourns on the lake shore, become the scene of the crowded action that follows. The Hurons have just learned of the outbreak of hostilities between the French and the English, and as adherents of the former, they are reluctant to break up their summer encampment without bearing away, as honourable trophies of their trip into enemy country, the scalps of the whites on the Glimmerglass. They are met half-way in their desire by Hutter and Hurry, who desire Indian scalps to collect the bounty which the British colonial government has placed on that commodity. The action is complicated by the arrival of Chingachgook, who, from more honourable motives, joins in Hurry's and Hutter's scalping expeditions. There is no point in detailing the situations that follow in quick succession. Reduced to a synopsis most plots sound exaggerated or silly—and this is particularly true of Cooper. Much of the persuasiveness of his actions comes from a perfect sense of dramatic timing, and this quality is especially dominant in *The Deerslayer*. As the novel progresses towards the later chapters, it comes to resemble a complicated choreography whose intricate measures resolve themselves in several lucid basic movements. There is, first of all, the opposition of two moral points of view represented in action by Deerslayer and Hurry; there is also the opposition between two racial viewpoints, for which identical actions may mean honour or dishonour; and, finally, there is the essential theme of Deerslayer's perfect dedication to his own vision of truth. There is a sense in which one might say that *The Deerslayer* is fictional hagiography. The extraordinary actions through which Deerslayer moves seem chosen, as in the legends of the saints, to illuminate the most hidden virtues; and as with the lives of the saints (as opposed to the pious tales of Christian edification more common in the English-speaking world), the result is to create a warmly human personality who has its evoked life in the goodness it embodies so masterfully.

The Glimmerglass, which is the confined and confining scene of all that happens, in its variety of natural moods between midnight, noon, and midnight, constantly suggests that equilibrium in nature which is the serene and indifferent resolution of all violence and blood. But if, after violence, Cooper describes it again and again in some tranquil dusk of early morning, or burst of cheerful sunlight, to suggest the returning dominance of nature after an interval of human strife, he uses it also to enforce the dramatic necessities of the action at any given time. The following description of night on the Glimmerglass is somewhat long, but I quote it because it illustrates the quality of Cooper's writing, which is better in this novel than anywhere else. Because of the threatened hostilities from the Hurons against the Castle during the night, Hutter and Deerslayer decide to embark their whole party in the ark, which is more expedient, both for escape and defense. It is already night when they embark in the large, slow-moving boat,

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whose biblical name is itself something of a portent:

> 'The vicinity of the hills, with their drapery of pines, had the effect to render nights that were obscure, darker than common on the lake. As usual, however, a belt of comparative light was stretched through the centre of the sheet, while it was within the shadow of the mountains, that the gloom rested most heavily on the water. The island, or castle, stood in this belt of comparative light, but still the night was so dark, as to cover the departure of the ark. At the distance of an observer on the shore, her movements could not be seen at all, more particularly as a background of dark hillside filled up the perspective of every view that was taken diagonally or directly across the water. The prevalent wind on the lakes of that region is west, but owing to the avenues formed by the mountains, it is frequently impossible to tell the true direction of the currents as they often vary within short distances, and brief differences of time. This is truer in light fluctuating puffs of air, than in steady breezes; though the squalls of even the latter are familiarly known to be uncertain and baffling in all mountainous regions and narrow waters. On the present occasion, Hutter himself (as he shoved the ark from her berth at the side of the platform) was at a loss to pronounce which way the wind blew. In common, this difficulty was solved by the clouds, which, floating above the hill tops, as a matter of course, obeyed the currents; but now the whole vault of heaven seemed a gloomy wall. Not an opening of any sort was visible' . . .

The action of *The Deerslayer* is convincing because the world in which it occurs is created with vividly realized circumstantial detail. It is less mere description than it is the evocation of the tangible reality of *things*. The passage just quoted loses a good deal, of course, by being torn from context. Its pressure on the nerves depends on the way it focuses, in the appalling, empty atmosphere of surrounding black, the suspense that has been built up through pages. But I have chosen this passage to quote in preference to others because of an interesting similarity it bears with a famous passage from Conrad—a great admirer of Cooper's—in *Nostromo*. It is Conrad's description of that night which Nostromo and Martin Decoud spend in a lighter on the Gulf with the silver shipment from the Gould mine:

> 'A great recrudescence of obscurity embraced the boat. The sea in the gulf was as black as the clouds above. Nostromo, after striking a couple of matches to get glimpses of the boat-compass he had with him in the lighter, steered by the feel of the wind on his cheek.
>
> 'It was a new experience for Decoud, this mysteriousness of the great waters spread out strangely smooth, as if their restlessness had been crushed by the weight of that dense night. The Placido was sleeping soundly under its black poncho.
>
> 'The main thing now was to get away from the coast and gain

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> the middle of the gulf before day broke. The Isabels were somewhere at hand. "On your left as you look forward, senor", said Nostromo suddenly. When his voice ceased, the enormous stillness, without light or sound, seemed to affect Decoud's senses like a powerful drug. He didn't even know at times whether he were asleep or awake. Like a man lost in slumber, he heard nothing, he saw nothing . . .' .

In both passages the blackness is so palpable that it is more concrete than the reality it conceals, and it provides a medium that confers a startling intensity on the actions that it feigns to smother. Both Cooper and Conrad share this extraordinary ability of tendering transient sensations and evocations of atmosphere with a psychological immediacy that can be terrifying. Although it is too long to quote here, an admirable instance of this quality in Cooper occurs in Chapter VI. Tom Hutter and Hurry Harry, impelled by the desire to secure the bounty on Indian scalps, have made an expedition to shore under cover of darkness to visit the Huron encampment which, they believe, is on this occasion inhabited mainly by squaws and children, the warriors having temporarily withdrawn to another part of the lake shore. Deerslayer, unable to prevent the excursion, is drawn up in a canoe among the rushes. Cooper evokes the atmosphere of the darkness brooding on the Glimmerglass with great effectiveness—"a gloom of night which threw its shadowy and fantastic forms around the lake, the forest, and the hills . . . . The size of the lake brought all within the reach of human senses . . ." . Suddenly, through this solitude and darkness comes the quavering call of a loon from the opposite side of the lake. "Shrill, tremulous, loud, and sufficiently prolonged, it seems the very cry of warning". And then, as the cry of the loon subsides a second time, "the profound stillness of night and solitude was broken by a cry so startling, as to drive all recollection of the more melancholy call of the loon from the listener's mind. It was a shriek of agony, that came either from one of the female sex, or from a boy so young as not yet to have attained a manly voice . . . . Heart-rending terror—if not writhing agony—was in the sounds, and the anguish that had awakened them was as sudden as it was fearful".

Tom Hutter and Hurry Harry are not simple cases of moral depravity. Their villainy is strictly legal, and encouraged by the government, and Cooper is fully aware of all their implication for American society. For if Hurry and Tom Hutter are not the Americans of the new age, they are clearly preparing the way for them. Their impressiveness in the book, however, springs from the concrete richness with which they are realized. They are before us, not only as superbly solid physical embodiments of the American wilderness-man, but the nature of the violent, if narrow, action is exactly calculated to illuminate the restricted stage of their moral consciousness. In an early dialogue between Deerslayer and Hurry on the subject of Indians, we have a finely-drawn picture of Hurry's mental processes—a picture so typical of a pattern that was to become representative of one line of American rationalizing that in

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Hurry we almost feel we have the artistic progenitor of Senator McCarran's racial ideal:

> ' "I look upon the red-man to be quite as human as we are ourselves, Hurry. They have their gifts and their religion, it's true; but that makes no difference in the end, when each will be judged according to his deeds, and not according to his skin".
>
> ' "That's downright missionary, and will find little favour up in this part of the country, where the Moravians don't congregate. Now, skin makes the man. This is reason; else how are people to judge each other. The skin is put on, over all, in order that when a creatur' or a mortal is fairly seen, you may know at once what to make of him. You know a bear from a hog, by his skin, and a grey squirrel from a black".
>
> ' "True, Hurry", said the other, looking back and smiling; "nevertheless, they are both squirrels".
>
> "Who denies it? But you'll not say that a red-man and a white man are both Indians?"
>
> ' "No; but *I do* say they are both men. Men of different races and colours, and having different gifts and traditions, but in the main, with the same natur'. Both have souls and both will be held accountable for their deeds in this life".
>
> 'Hurry was one of those theorists who believed in the inferiority of all the human race, who were not white. His notions on the subject were not very clear, nor were his definitions at all well settled; but his opinions were not the less dogmatical, or fierce. His conscience accused him of sundry lawless acts against the Indians, and he had found it an exceedingly easy mode of quieting it, by putting the whole family of red-men, incontinently, without the category of human rights. Nothing angered him sooner than to deny his proposition, more especially if the denial were accompanied by a show of plausible argument; and he did not listen to his companion's remarks with much composure of either manner or feeling'.

Hurry as moralist is a type we have with us still in American literature. The above passage might be compared with the long argument on Indian killing in Melville's *The Confidence Man*, which employs similar arguments. But Cooper is more successful because Hurry is a thoroughly convincing realistic figure, whereas Melville's Indian-killer, Colonel Moredock, although an actual historical person, exists in the medium of Melville's irony with an unsatisfactory (that is to say, muddy) ambiguity. Melville would have rejected the clear-cut "placing" of values which the presence of Deerslayer achieves. And moving up from Melville, we can find Hurry's mental type persisting in the wealthy and socially secure Tom Buchanan of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*:

> ' "Civilization's going to pieces", broke out Tom violently. "I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read *The Rise of the Coloured Races* by this man Goddard? . . . Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea

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is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved".

Or, going on from fiction to more 'responsible' utterances, we have this from the weight-lifter's brain of Teddy Roosevelt in his pre-Presidential years. The passage illustrates, almost *too* vividly, the degree to which the moral temper of Hurry Harry had become irremovably embedded, like a broken off arrowhead, in the intellectual muscles of the opulent and mighty—even when they liked to think of themselves as progressive:

> 'I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are the dead Indians, but I believe that nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn't like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth. The most vicious cowboy has more moral principle than the average Indian.'[2]

In Hurry Harry and his moral vision of life we have an early representative of a type that was to become a dominant element in American civilization as it moved along towards the Gilded Age—a type that could supplant moral motives by motives of commercial expediency, and pretend, even to itself, that the substitution had never been made. Cooper's perceptions in creating Hurry Harry are profound and accurate. Although he doesn't perceptibly wince at the idea of scalping Indian children for the bounty, he is in some ways a pattern of the forthright, impulsive, attractive young American. If I may resort for convenience's sake to a cinematic comparison, the Gary Cooper of the late 'thirties exactly evokes his young dashing image. Much of Fenimore Cooper's genius is shown in the way he effectively suggests the squalid reality behind the romantic figure of the woods. And it is well to bear in mind that this brand of American romanticism was partly cultivated in Cooper's day for the sake of putting some colour of attractive decorum on the crimes of the American wilderness, without which the expansion of the frontier would have notably lagged—or so it seemed. The delicacy of Cooper's distinctions is poised and precise. If he gives the dark side of Hurry, he never identifies him with the overt criminality of old Tom Hutter, the ex-pirate:

> 'But neither of these two rude beings, so ruthless in all that touches the rights and interests of the red man, though possessing veins of human feeling on other matters, was much actuated by any other desire than a heartless longing for profit. Hurry had felt angered at his sufferings, when first liberated, it is true, but that emotion had soon disappeared in the habitual love of gold. which he sought with the reckless avidity of a needy spendthrift, rather than with the ceaseless longings of a miser. In short, the motive that urged them both so soon to go against the Hurons, was an habitual contempt of their enemy, acting on the unceasing

[2] Quoted from Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, page 209.

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cupidity of prodigality. The additional chances of success, however, had their place in the formation of the second enterprise. It was known that a large portion of the warriors—perhaps all—were encamped for the night, abreast of the castle, and it was hoped that the scalps of helpless victims would be the consequence. To confess the truth, Hutter in particular—he who had just left two daughters behind him, expected to find few besides women and children in the camp. This fact had been but slightly alluded to in his communications with Hurry, and with Chingachgook it had been kept entirely out of view'.

Hurry Harry is the portent of how things were to go in America. Hurry is a woodsman, but his relation with the wilderness is opposed to Deerslayer's. His true roots are in the settlements, and the wilderness exists for him essentially as a business that he may make periodic visits to "civilization" with his pockets jingling. Hurry is an indication of how things *will* be, Deerslayer of how they might have been. Deerslayer exists on a different level of the imagination than Hurry. He is essentially a poetic evocation, and his conception inevitably incorporates an element of myth in so far as myth may be defined as the incarnation of racial aspiration and memory. His vision of life is best summed up in this speech from Chapter XV:

' "As for farms, they have their uses, and there's them that like to pass their lives on 'em; but, what comfort can a man look for in a clearin' that he can't find in double quantities in the forest? If air, and room, and light, are a little craved, the wind-rows and the streams will furnish 'em, or here are the lakes for such as have bigger longings in that way; but where are you to find your shades, and laughing springs, and leaping brooks, and vinerable trees, a thousand years old, in a clearin'? You don't find *them*, but you find their disabled trunks, marking the 'arth like head-stones in a graveyard. It seems to me that the people who live in such places, must be always thinkin' of their own inds, and of universal decay; and that, too, not of the decay that is brought about by time and natur', but the decay that follows waste and violence. Then as to churches, they are good, I suppose, else wouldn't good men uphold 'em. But they are not altogether necessary. They call 'em the temples of the Lord; but Judith, the whole 'arth is a temple of the Lord to such as have right minds. Moreover, all is contradiction in the settlements, while all is concord in the woods. Forts and churches almost always go together, and yet they're downright contradictions; churches being for peace, and forts for war".'

Tolerance is touted like a commercial product in America, although it frequently doesn't move on the market. Consequently, the word seems a rather shabby one to employ in a critical article. But tolerance is nothing more than intelligence and sensitive understanding—perception deep enough to find the substantial likeness under the shadows of division. It there is a poetry of

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tolerance, Deerslayer is its expression. At any rate, it is what radically distinguishes him from the more characteristically American Hurry Harry. The following exchange between them may seem to add but little to a quotation I have already given, but so important is this quality for understanding Deerslayer and his role that some repetition is justified:

> ' "God made us all, white, black, and red; and, no doubt, had his own wise intentions in colouring us differently. Still, he made us, in the main, much the same in feelin's; though I'll not deny, he gave each race its gifts. A white man's gifts, are christianized, while a red-skin's are more for the wilderness. Thus, it would be a great offense for a white man to scalp the dead; whereas, it's a signal vartue in an Indian. Then ag'in a white man can't amboosh women and children in war, while a red-skin may. 'Tis a *cruel* work, I'll allow; but for them it's *lawful* work; while for *us* it would be grievous work".
>
> ' "That depends on your inimy. As for scalping, or even skinning a savage, I look upon them pretty much the same as cutting off the ears of wolves, for the bounty, or stripping a bear of its hide. And then you're out significantly, as to taking the poll of a red-skin in hand, seeing that the very Colony has offered a bounty for the job; all the same as it pays for wolves' ears, and crows' heads".'

Cooper never forgets that Hurry's scalping practices are legally sanctioned and encouraged by the government under which Deerslayer, also, lives. Perversely, it is Hurry, not Deerslayer, who follows the pattern set down by the Colony for the preservation of law, order, and the more doubtful decencies. This obviously relates to the dilemma that confronted Cooper in his other novels, and which is at the base of his social criticism. In some ways, Deerslayer is as much of an outsider in the American wilderness as the Effinghams were in the American drawing rooms that shattered their sensibilities. But as a positive norm, Deerslayer is both a moral and an artistic triumph which those egregious snobs, the Effinghams, are not.

But the mere statement of Deerslayer's tolerance, as it comes out in such passages of dialogue as the one here quoted, does an injustice to the living figure of Deerslayer as it exists in the novel. The whole action is animated by Deerslayer's vision. It takes firm control of the movement, elevating it above plot mechanics into the realm of life and moral form. Closely related to, and growing out of this tolerant understanding of life is a reverence for life itself. One of the most moving passages in *The Deerslayer* occurs in Chapter VII when Deerslayer kills his first Indian in self-defence. Mr. Yvor Winters in *Maule's Curse* has quoted lengthily from this passage, which he refers to as probably 'the best single passage of prose in Cooper'.[4] I have not the space to deal with it here, but its importance lies, not only as Mr. Winters maintains, in powerfully communicating 'the tremendous and impersonal quiet of the

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American wilderness', (though it certainly does that), but in registering, both with tenderness and surgical realism, the tensions of a highly developed and refined moral consciousness under the shock of a brutal necessity.

Deerslayer's reverence for life in an environment almost as inimical to such an attitude as our own blood-streaked century, diffuses itself through the wilderness that surrounds the Glimmerglass, and the resistance its presence offers to the widening stream of blood that flows before us, gives meaning to what would otherwise strike us as silly slaughter. The reverence for life is not, in Deerslayer's case, confined to human kind. Late in the novel, when Deerslayer is given a fine rifle with which he longs to prove his skill, he sights an eagle 'hovering at a considerable height above the hut, greedily watching for an opportunity to make a swoop; its hungry young elevating their heads from a nest that was in sight, in the naked summit of a dead pine'. Deerslayer brings the eagle down with a single shot, but a moment after his triumph of marksmanship, Deerslayer turns to his friend, Chingachgook (the Great Serpent):

> ' "We've done an onthoughtful thing, Sarpant—yes, Judith, we've done an onthoughtful thing in taking life with an object no better than vanity!" exclaimed Deerslayer, when the Delaware held up the enormous bird by its wings, and exhibited the dying eyes riveted on its enemies with the gaze that the helpless ever fasten on their destroyers. " 'Twas more becomin' two boys to gratify their feelin's in this onthoughtful manner, than two warriors on a warpath, even though it be their first. Ah's! me; well, as a punishment I'll quit you at once, and when I find myself alone with them bloody-minded Mingos, it's more than like I'll have occasion to remember that life is sweet, even to the beasts of the woods and the fowls of the air".'

Dramatically, the central episode of *The Deerslayer* is that in which Natty, a captive of the Hurons, is released on his honour for a period of twenty-four hours, but at the end of that time is obliged to return to captivity with the almost certain knowledge that he will be put to the torture and death. Natty keeps the terms of his promise to the letter, although to do so appears madness to his companions, and probably seems ludicrous heroics to a good many readers. Nevertheless, this episode is the key to the significance of Deerslayer's life, which is moulded in the imagination with the firm spiritual contours of the saint. And I use the term with conviction, for that, to the American imagination, is, or ought to

[4] Mr. Winters' essay is very useful, and it has been too little acknowledged by far worse writers on Cooper. But Mr. Winters offers an incomprehensible judgement on *The Deerslayer*. For him, it displays few serious merits, and 'even as a story purely of adventure is far inferior in plot and movement to half a dozen other stories by Cooper'.

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be, Natty's role.[5] I cannot pause to discuss this episode here; but it reveals Natty's vision of life to us as a passionate dedication to truth—and truth, not as the pragmatical nothingness it was to become in American life, but as a religious conception. To Hurry Harry's argument against his returning to the Hurons ('What's an Indian or a word passed, or a furlough taken from creatures like them, that have neither souls nor names?'), Deerslayer replies:

> '"If they've got neither souls nor names, you and I have both, Harry March, and one is accountable for the other. This furlough is not, as you seem to think, altogether a matter atween me and the Mingos, seeing it is a solemn bargain atween me and God. He who thinks he can say what he pleases, in his distress, and that 'twill all pass for nothing, because 'tis uttered in the forest, and into red men's ears, knows little of his situation, and hopes, and wants. The words are said to the ears of the Almighty. The air is his breath, and the light of the sun is little more than a glance of his eye".'

There is little opportunity left in which to speak of Judith Hutter, the beautiful girl who prefers Deerslayer to her suitor, Hurry Harry. Judith is the wonderful exception to that great army of female horrors who announce themselves as Cooper's heroines. She is a complete, if minor, success, even to her enigmatic disappearance at the end of the book. She is a human being to whom things can happen spiritually. Cooper was often able to create impressive old women. There is Mrs. Lechmere in *Lionel Lincoln*, who reminds one very strongly of the old Countess in Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*; or Aaron Thousandacre's toil-worn wife in *The Chainbearer*, who is given a beautiful moment of moral grandeur at the desolate grave-side of her fierce old husband; or even the blowzy, dirty, drunken Betty Flannagan of *The Spy*, so obviously cut to an Elizabethan pattern, but who falls just short of success because Cooper is too reticent when it comes to recording the profanities and obscenities that, in a more general way, he credits her with. But Judith Hutter is the only real success among his young women, and she remains a haunting presence in one's memory. Under her reputation for lightness one is aware of spiritual depth and perceptions that often masquerade as vanities. If *The Deerslayer* has a fault it is that Deerslayer never quite does justice to her potential fineness. She is cut from a cloth that Cooper used only once, apparently preferring the Eve Effingham

[5]Although I do not wish to discuss the other Leatherstocking novels here, considering *The Deerslayer*, which concludes the series, the imaginative culmination in which Natty achieves his definitive spiritual stature, I cannot forbear remarking that Natty's death scene as a very old man in *The Prairie*—a scene in which he encounters his God face to face in the sunset—is literally the death scene of a dying saint as we have grown to expect such scenes from their Lives.

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sateen. Judith proposes to Deerslayer when she finds that he will not propose to her—but while Deerslayer has been described by some critics as merely intent on an ideal bachelor existence, gracefully free of responsibility, Deerslayer is less a bachelor than a priest of the wilderness. Marriage would violate the imaginative integrity of Cooper's whole conception. Deerslayer's life is a vocation, and his dedication is complete. Judith asks him:

> ' "And where, then, is *your* sweetheart, Deerslayer?"
>
> ' "She's in the forest, Judith—hanging from the boughs of the trees, in a soft rain—in the dew on the open grass—the clouds that float about in the blue heavens—the birds that sing in the woods—the sweet springs where I slake my thirst—and in all the other glorious gifts that come from God's Providence!" '

Ever since Mark Twain was unwise enough to print an unspeakably bad essay on Cooper's prose, in which he ridiculed Natty's form of speech, it has been customary to find fault with Deerslayer's imagery. This is obtuse nonsense. Cooper's writing, as I insisted in the first part of this essay, is loose, and Natty's speeches would, in many cases, have been improved had Cooper worked on them longer; but at their best they represent an authentic poetry that is as good as the speech rhythms Synge evolved later.

V

In the space that remains I should like to attempt a brief summing up of what I have said about Cooper, and perhaps draw a conclusion or two. I said that Cooper begins with Jane Austen. That is to say, the actions he records, exciting as they are considered simply as adventure tales, are merely the outward sign of a moral movement or pattern which makes up the real form of the novel. I have tried to illustrate this in a general way in the Revolutionary novels and the novels of social criticism, which I offered as early types of the typically American conception of the international novel. In analyzing *The Deerslayer* I have tried to trace this conception of an action as the form of a novel in more specific detail. In closing, there is one further question I should like to raise. On the surface, there seems to be little relation between a novel like *Homeward Bound* and *The Deerslayer*. But it is possible that Natty Bumppo is, at a deeper level, connected with the whole conception of the international novel, and of the American international hero, as he finally appeared with the ultimate brush and polish from the hands of Henry James. If one turns back to the quotation, given in Part III of this essay, which describes Hugh Roger Littlepage and his Parisian boudoir, it is surprising to consider that only a few years separate the writing of *The Redskins* from the writing of *The Deerslayer*. By the time *The Deerslayer* was written, Cooper had already produced many of his novels of social criticism, although the Littlepage novels were still to come. Despite their more-than-occasional insights, the social novels are deficient in tone, crotchety, and, on the whole, disappointing. The deficiencies

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in American social life which aroused Cooper's most waspish anger when he directed his attention to the petty levels of polite provincial intercourse are precisely the deficiencies that are rectified on the more exalted imaginative level of Natty Bumppo's life. Natty Bumppo, the dedicated man of the wilderness, replete with untutored virtues and natural refinement, complex in the very intensity of his simplicity, is all that the American, cut off from Europe, as Hawthorne liked to put it, and labouring under the shadow of a commonplace prosperity, could possibly wish to be. He is wholly an American thing, and so fine in himself that he leaves Europe quite behind. If we think of Cooper standing between Natty Bumppo, the natural American saint, and his other creation, Hugh Roger Littlepage, the super-refined and super-educated American, just back from twenty years in Europe, it is clear that Cooper invented and used two of the fundamental ingredients of the international novel. Cooper never effectually introduced these two elements to each other in his art. The habitué of the wilderness and the habitué of European capitals never achieve imaginative fusion in a single figure, although Cooper was working in that direction. But when the American international theme came to its fullest flowering, the image of the hero who was the reddest rose on the tree was a man—usually wealthy—of great natural simplicity and goodness, and of quite incorruptible heart. He could not, perhaps, catch a tomakawk in mid air and return it to the sender as Deerslayer could, but he was no less capable of taking care of himself among the far more treacherous tribes of Europeans. Like Hugh Roger Littlepage, he had a remarkable facility for picking up foreign cultures by personal exposure through a number of well-financed years, but if he 'picked up' the culture, he purified it in the process; and in the end, he went back to the Glimmerglass, or if he didn't, it was clear that he should have done. One need not call out, at this point, the characters from Henry James who fit these shoes. It would be a long procession. Without even suggesting the question of 'influence', and speaking only in the broadest of generalities, one might say that Natty Bumppo dramatically struck the American imagination and tradition at one of its moments of sophisticated, self-justifying awareness, and Strether or Adam Verver was the reflex.

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'KING LEAR' (II)

THE Third Act of *King Lear*, which covers the storm and its counterpart in human behaviour, is the key-stone upon which the whole elaborate construction of the play rests. It is, above all, a marvellous example of poetic elaboration for dramatic purposes. At the centre of it, at once the main protagonist and symbol of the spiritual state of a humanity exposed to fundamental disorder, wrenched out of its 'fixed place' in the 'frame of nature', stands the figure of the aged King. The intimate dove-tailing of personal conflict with external convulsions has often been noted, and is indeed an essential part of the conception. The storm which has broken out in Lear's mind, the result of his treatment at the hands of his children, is admirably fused with the description of the warring elements, mainly entrusted to his lips; the external storm, whilst exercising upon his aged physique the intolerable strain under which it finally breaks, is itself a projection of his inner state, being fused with it as a single poetic reality. The opening dialogue between Kent and the Gentleman, as they meet on the wind-swept heath,[1] makes this perfectly clear. Kent's query 'Who's there, besides foul weather?' is answered by 'One minded like the weather, most unquietly'; from this moment the spiritual disorder and its external projection are related, united in a single process of much the same kind as that by which the Witches, in the opening scene of *Macbeth*, establish the spiritual climate of the tragedy—'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'—and indicate the state of moral ambiguity with which the tragedy is concerned.

It is no more than a step to pass from this opening to the picture, which follows immediately, of the King 'Contending with the fretful elements' and striving—most significantly of all—'in his little world of man' to 'outscorn'

> The to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain.

The fact, established immediately after, that this is a night in which even the lion, 'the cub-drawn bear' and the 'belly-pinched wolf'—and it is worth observing, perhaps, that Lear has himself lost his children and is about to be exposed to hunger—would seek for shelter is a measure of the strength of the contending passions by which he is torn as on a rack and which compel him in his agony to contemplate the advent of universal anarchy, bidding 'what will take all'. Lear, in short, now clearly assumes a stature that is more than merely personal, becomes man, the microcosm of the universe, exposed to a suffering to which the frame of things itself contributes, but which finds its acutest symbol in the intimate disunion which the earlier action of the play has introduced into the family bond.

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[1]Act III, Scene i.

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The whole Act is beautifully contrived around this central situation. If Lear has himself become 'unaccommodated man,' it is clearly felt that he is unable to bear alone the whole weight of the situation for which the tragic conception has destined him. He is, therefore, by a superb piece of artistic tact, surrounded during his exposure to the elements by a number of characters whose fortunes we have already followed in the first two Acts and who serve, as it were, as the external buttresses of a great architectural construction to take from him some of the strain to which he would otherwise, as a dramatic creation, be subjected. It is perhaps the presence of these buttresses in *Lear* that are the best measures of the play's success, speaking in terms of artistic conception, when compared with a play which suggests a certain partial coincidence of mood, *Timon of Athens*. Timon is too isolated in his suffering, and his denunciation of the human environment is too extensive, too generalized, to carry complete conviction. The situation of Lear is different. Although he bears throughout the storm, and indeed the play, the main weight of suffering, and although his situation is, as we have suggested, a concentration of that of man in general, he is surrounded by beings who, in varying degrees, suffer with him, and who are further used, each in his appropriate way, to illuminate some aspect of his central situation. The Fool, Kent, and Edgar each, from his own point of view, bear some fraction of Lear's tragic burden, show an insight into some part of its significance; and before the Act ends, he is further joined by Gloucester, whose fortunes have been from the first evidently parallel to his own. The result is an intricate and progressive dovetailing of characters and situations which lead us, step by step, further and further into an understanding of the full depth and meaning of the universal tragedy which Lear's outraged fatherhood and shattered royalty embody.

Lear's first appearance in the storm (III, ii) shows him in the state of resentful denunciation which precedes the dawn of understanding. He calls upon the storm to execute upon 'nature', upon the whole universe, the curse of sterility he had already called down upon his own daughters:

> Crack nature's moulds, all germins spill at once
> That make ungrateful man!

The root of his indignation, however, is still self-pity, still a sense of outrage at an 'unkindness', a lack of kinship, which he rightly feels to be contrary to nature, but whose relation to his own folly he does not yet grasp. The only new element so far introduced by the storm into his interpretation of his own condition is the realization, already born in the preceding encounter with Goneril and Regan,[2] that the vain, impulsive monarch of the opening scene is now in his own estimation what he already was then, at least in potentiality, a 'poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man'. His

[2] Act II, Scene iv.

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understanding of this reality, though not in itself necessarily of positive value, is nevertheless an indispensable condition of further spiritual development.

The deeper causes of Lear's tragedy, those which have the closest bearing upon his further fortunes, have still to emerge during the course of the following action, mainly through his changing relationship to those around him. The first step in bringing them to light is taken at this very moment, and the instrument is the Fool. In the relationship, during the tempest, between the King and his Fool, we have a clear case of one of those significant inversions of which this play is particularly fond. King and Fool, master and slave as they have so far been, now become, in the hour of Lear's helplessness, something very different; the bond between them grows ever closer and, in the inversion of Lear's mind through which he sees himself, as it were, up-side-down, in reflection, we become aware of a deeper relation of contraries, that of the 'wise man' and the 'fool'. The essence of this relationship consists in a reversal of accepted values. The supposedly wise man of the opening scene, the Lear who was in a position to have his slave whipped and to exercise his own will without fear of contradiction, has become, as his own acts have shown, the fool, and his former creature is now in a position to offer the comments of a practical, popular wisdom upon his behaviour and prospects. Yet both, perhaps, like separated fragments of a single mind, have something in common. The Fool represents for 'royal Lear' the voice of reality which, to his own ruin, he sought to ignore, but which was somewhere present beneath his own favourable estimate of himself; and Lear, in turn, retains for the Fool at least part of that compelling note of authority which draws from him, even in his master's diminished state, a loyalty which his own disillusioned rationalism can hardly justify:

> The knave turns fool that runs away;
> The fool no knave, perdy. (II, iv)

And both, in their divided unity, are bound together by common exposure to an external force that seems to pity neither wise man nor fool'.

The Fool, indeed, begins by responding to Lear's outburst with a deliberate reminder of the folly that has brought him to his present situation. 'Court holy-water', or flattery (of the kind accepted and indeed invited by Lear from his daughters) is, he says, more compatible with material comfort than exposure to the elements; Lear has lost his 'dry house' through his own folly, and whether he will learn, spiritually speaking, from the sincerity of 'rain-water', tempest, remains to be seen. When he advises his master to seek his daughters' blessing, he is at once stressing ironically the natural paternal position, which Lear's own folly has caused him to lose, and looking forward to the later scenes in which the full symbolic significance of that blessing is stressed in Lear's reconciliation to

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Cordelia.[3] The Fool in his function, however, soon penetrates beneath these obvious dramatic contrasts to touch upon the emotional situation which has given rise to them. In so doing, he enters directly into what we may call the sub-conscious ground of the play, bringing out motives which throw light upon Lear's own behaviour but of which Lear himself, in his assumption of regal simplicity, has so far been quite unaware. The contrast between the 'wise man' and the 'fool', between he who 'has a house to put's head in' and a 'good headpiece' and he who, like his master, lacks both, belongs indeed to Lear's own nature. It is seen in terms of a deeper conflict between controlling reason and a passion whose ultimate impulse is, as always, sexual.

The incontinency of 'blood', indeed, has played a large part in bringing the protagonists of the play to their tragic situation. It led to the birth of Edmund, who has now turned against his father, and drove Lear, in his unawareness and senility, to seek flattery from his daughters and so to expose himself to their treatment of him; in general, it has caused a reversal of the state of 'nature' by replacing the 'heart' of due affection by the 'toe' of an undue craving for flattery. The Fool's attitude to this situation is characteristically complex, even to the point of ambiguity. As we saw at an earlier stage,[4] his reason tells him that the contrast between 'head' and 'heart', with which he is so concerned, can be interpreted as one between thrift, an economic foresight that is essentially self-regarding, and thriftless improvidence; the poor man who follows the promptings of natural instinct, symbolized in the 'cod-piece', before he has made due provision against an evil day, is apt to find his whole being, 'head' and 'heart' alike, involved in a catastrophe which his rational faculties had no part in willing:

> The cod-piece that will house
> Before the head has any,
> The head and he shall louse
> So beggars marry many.

This saying reflects an ethic to which the whole of society, as pictured in *King Lear*, gives tacit assent. It does not, however, represent the complete picture. A more careful reading of this, one of the most significant of all his comments, will show that the Fool himself does not regard his own statement as all the truth. We have already found reason for thinking that part at least of the Fool's nature, concerned with the human inadequacy of an exclusively acquisitve morality, refuses to accept thrift as a supreme virtue; and, indeed, in the second part of his rhyme he shifts his ground deliberately, substituting the contrast between 'head' and 'cod-piece' by another, not less fundamental to human nature, between 'heart' and 'toe', between proper feeling and its unworthy caricature in unchecked indulgence. 'Head', 'heart', and 'cod-piece', in fact,

[3]Act IV, Scene vii.
[4]Act I, Scene iv.

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represent a triangular relationship which replaces the more superficial one between control and indiscipline, thrift and improvidence as a true reflection of the human situation. It is with the possible relationships contained in this triangle that the tragedy of *King Lear* is concerned.

The evident contradictions in human behaviour, personal and social, can only be properly understood in fact by reference to an ethical distinction more profound than any so far indicated. Possession and poverty, self-control and indulgence are, after all, relative categories, capable of interpretation by each individual in the light of his own situation and fortunes, and therefore, in the last resort, not universally revealing. What is needed for a complete picture is a reading of human nature which will carry us eventually beyond the Fool's vision of reality, including it, but without being bounded by its limitations. Of this vision, indeed, his own words, reaching out beyond his normal disillusioned realism, occasionally give a dim, broken indication. One of these indications occurs precisely at this point, when the Fool, on the entry of Kent, develops his point even more profoundly in the phrase: 'here's grace and a cod-piece: that's a wise man and a fool'. Wisdom and folly, rather even than implying a contrast between reason and passion, or still less between saving and spending, involves a deeper one, which in turn illuminates the others, between 'grace', the state of harmony in accordance with a 'natural' sanction, and the rebellious 'cod-piece'. The word 'grace', full of significance in all Shakespeare's later plays, here acquires almost for the first time something of its full meaning as expression of a supernaturally sanctioned harmony; this harmony has been broken up in Lear by the operation of the 'cod-piece' of uncontrolled instinct operating outside the balanced order of 'nature' and leading, among other things, to improvident poverty. The personal conflict is thus, by a further extension of significance, not only related to its social consequences but given a universal spiritual content.

At this stage, and before the end of the scene, Kent enters to makes his contribution to the expanding pattern of meaning. The following dialogue between him and Lear carries us still further into the profundities of the play's conception. Kent's evocation of the dreadful reality of the storm does more than serve the dramatic purpose of taking some of the burden of its poetic recreation from Lear. Expressed in terms that remind us, in their dramatic function, of the storm described by Ross and the Old Man which coincided with Duncan's murder in *Macbeth* (II, iv), it leads up to an indication of intolerable pressure directed against the false, shallow homogeneity of man's appearance or 'nature':

> man's nature cannot carry
> The affliction nor the fear.

By this irresistible action upon the surface appearances of human behaviour, in fact, the storm contributes decisively to the attainment of that fuller understanding of man's real nature which we have

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just seen implied in the utterances of the Fool. It is not Kent but Lear once more, however, that takes the vital step of relating this fear concretely to a conception of supernatural judgment. The 'dreadful pother' of the storm is, for him, the work of the 'great gods', and its purpose is to allow them to 'find out their enemies', in the shape of sin and sinners. The fear felt by helpless humanity in the presence of the elements is now seen, in fact, as proceeding from a universal consciousness of guilt. Under the pressure of the storm Lear finds himself awakening to a new awareness of sin. By a kind of process of celestial whipping (justice and the whip are repeatedly connected in this play), the storm brings to the surface the 'undivulged crimes' which are normally hidden under the decent seeming of man's social nature. The emphasis is throughout upon concealment and deception, upon the '*simular* man of virtue', upon '*covert* and convenient seeming', upon '*concealing* continents' and '*close* pent-up guilts'. The tempest, in short, is at once an instrument of justice operating upon man through the action of an obscure but purposeful divinity and a symbol of the warring elements in his own microcosm, elements normally subdued in the surface appearance of harmony but here riven apart, seen fully in their potential disunity The storm has come to 'rive' the 'concealing continents' of man's sophistication, to act as a 'summoner' before which the sin so disclosed is compelled to cry 'grace' as a first step in the restoration of spiritual health.

Meanwhile Lear's own spiritual understanding is presented as being, at this point, in a curiously intermediate state. At the end of his speech, a certain note of self-pity is still very much alive in him.

> I am a man
> More sinn'd against than sinning,

he affirms and, although there is truth in his statement, it reads inadequately after the preceding invocation of the divine action. This is not, however, the whole truth. Lear's sufferings, indeed, have still barely begun, and in his next phrase—'My wits begin to turn'—we are brought a step further towards realizing them; he will have to lose his precarious control of his wits, to become—in the Fool's terminology—himself a fool, before he can emerge on the far side of his ordeal. Meanwhile, as has often been noted, his sufferings have already made him more aware than ever before of those of others, and he is concerned that his companions should find shelter. The theme of poverty, already touched upon in previous scenes, is now forcing its way to the fore in Lear's mind, becoming an integral part of his growing experience. Seeing the Fool suffering from cold his thought leads him for the first time to make the fateful connection established in his simple 'I am cold myself'. A common destiny is thus established, and the whole emotional range of this episode thereby inconceivably widened. Necessity, indeed, in spite of and beyond the obvious cruelty with which it imposes itself, possesses the strange 'art' of making 'vile things precious'. Lear's speech concludes:

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> Poor knave and fool, I have one part of my heart
> That's sorry yet for thee;

and the Fool, in his song, hails this solicitude as the birth of 'a little tiny wit', as a glimpse of self-knowledge revealed, significantly, in the very process of breaking reason, in opposition to Lear's own related assertion about his failing self-control. The Fool's final utterance, 'This is a brave night to cool a courtezan', takes up Lear's previous emphasis on the 'cold' and brings us back once more to the theme of passion and to the chastening influence upon it of the action of the elements.

Lear's next appearance (Scene IV) takes us several steps further in the exploration of the poetic universe with which this part of the play is particularly concerned. As it opens, Kent, who shows throughout the particular solicitude for human frailty which is in him a natural extension of loyalty, emphasizes the incapacity of man's 'nature' to endure the action of the elements. Lear, in his reply, at once stresses the existence of a fundamental unity between the external and the internal commotion, the tempest in his mind and that which rages without, and shows signs of a breaking coherence:

> . . . the tempest in my mind
> Doth from my senses take all feeling else
> Save what beats there.

'Filial ingratitude' is conceived by him in terms of a bestial struggle between the different parts of a single body—

> Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
> For lifting food to it?—

and from now on the imagery of beasts in conflict, of the human organism torn remorselessly apart as though by fang and claw, or by the pitiless action of the rack, will play an increasing part in the play. The 'concealing continents' of man's nature, already invoked by Lear in the previous scene, are indeed now being riven open, and the state of animal anarchy so revealed is no more than a physical projection of the 'guilts' which they normally cover. Under the strain imposed upon him by this spectacle Lear's own mental coherence, in the course of the same speech, visibly breaks down. Threats of undetermined future actions which he is obviously in no position to undertake ('I will punish home') alternate with assertions of his capacity to 'endure'; these in turn are related to fresh expressions of his characteristic self-pity ('In such a night as this! . . . Your kind old father'), and beneath all these fragments of a once unified intelligence, present, as a threat visibly approaching, lies the shadow of coming madness: 'O that way madness lies . . . No more of that!'

Disintegration, however, is only one aspect of Lear's development at this stage. Not all that is coming to the surface under the elemental pressure to which he is being exposed is anarchic and

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negative. The distinctively human solicitude which is an essential part of the loyal Kent's contribution to the total structure of the whole episode begins now to communicate itself to the aged King, reinforcing the growth in sympathy already noted in the previous scene. A process contrary to that which has so far mainly concerned us, but not less important for an understanding of the complete pattern, is simultaneously taking place in his mind. After inviting the Fool to take shelter, he says, in fact, 'I'll pray, and then I'll sleep'. The reference to prayer is a new development in the speaker's hitherto self-centred attitude, and 'sleep'—the symbolic connection of which with healing is apparent in so many of Shakespeare's plays from *Macbeth* onwards—looks forward, for the first time, to the great meeting with Cordelia which will eventually round off his exposure to the elements. The content of Lear's prayer is, in itself, something new in him and not so far expressed with comparable clarity in the play. It concerns the speaker as King rather than as father, his responsibilities to society rather than his position as head of a family. The starting-point of the prayer is, in fact, the reference to 'houseless poverty' inspired in him by contemplation of the Fool. Contemplating the pitiful state of those whose 'heads' are 'houseless' (once more, he is taking up concepts originally broached, in his characteristically enigmatic form, by the Fool) and whose 'sides' are 'unfed', he is brought to a fresh awareness of his own lack of understanding—

> O, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this!—

and, as a reaction against it, to introduce more specifically than ever before a concern for justice. The elemental equity already invoked in the previous scene now gives way to a more clearly moral criterion, one which may even be described as concretely social. The conscious contemplation of misery is a 'physic' for such 'pomp' as Lear himself has been familiar with and taken for granted; it leads, in terms of what we may call social morality, to a desire to redress the balance of the superfluous well-being ('the superflux') of the privileged and thus—with tremendous daring—'to show the heavens more just'.

It is at this point that the scope of the action is still further enlarged by the entry of Edgar, in whom the state of 'houseless poverty'—already anticipated by himself in an earlier speech (II, iii)—becomes a visible reality. The meeting between outcast father and rejected son, indeed, contributes decisively to the expanding pattern of the tragedy. The connection between Lear's new preoccupation with nakedness and poverty and the guise of 'Tom o' Bedlam' under which Gloucester's son is driven to appear are clear enough. The feigned lunacy of Edgar, moreover, besides giving fresh point to the play's growing concern with social disorder, serves also as a mirror in which certain aspects of the emotional conflict which dominates Lear's distraught mind are significantly reflected. In the fortunes of 'poor Tom', as related by Edgar, the personal

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and social issues which are in process of clarifying themselves in Lear's mind are brought together, presented as closely related symptoms of a single disorder; and this clarification, in due course, penetrates Lear's own consciousness and leads to the next stage in his spiritual progress.

Edgar's description of his supposed descent into poverty is, from this point of view, of the greatest importance. When 'poor Tom' describes himself as a 'serving-man, proud in heart and mind', he focusses attention upon a contradiction that is at once personal, a consequence of the ambiguous part played by the passions in human behaviour, and social, a reflection of the mixture of unnatural servility and ferocious pride produced by devotion to worldly advancement. A 'serving-man' may be either, in the idiom of the day, a proud courtier who has obtained advancement and the power that goes with it, by giving obsequious service to his master, or the slave, in a less public sphere, of his mistress, to whose favour, again, he may owe his social position and so, indirectly, his pride; but the fact that he is 'proud in heart' may, in turn, indicate not only the satisfaction he feels in the position he has attained, but the intensity of passion that has led him, again in Edgar's own words, 'to serve the lust of his mistress' heart' by doing 'the act of darkness with her'. It is this ambiguous relationship, social and personal, between pride and servitude in a distorted world, in fact, that is illustrated by this essentially common-place story of the fine courtier's downward progress to Bedlam; for private lust and public ambition are connected links in the chain of egoistic impulses by which he has been impelled to break the bonds of 'nature' in the following of unrestrained appetite. Alternately arrogant and servile, free from all traditional bonds and the slave to his own passions, 'poor Tom' is the reflection of a society that has set its 'toe' in the place which should have been occupied by the 'heart' and thus produced a state of affairs whose psychological mirror is madness. Led by his own baser instincts to follow the delusions reflected in his nightmares, 'to course his own shadow for a traitor', consumed by fear of the envy and intrigue of those who covet his situation, and to 'ride on a bay trotting-horse', like a successful man of the world, but over bottomless gulfs inadequately spanned by 'four-inched bridges', he has lived in a state of frantic unreality which fitly mirrors Lear's precarious wits and is finally reduced, after exposure to the prevailing 'cold', to the state of 'unaccommodated man'.

It is as such that Lear, in his newly-born consciousness of moral realities, sees him. With his own nakedness confronted by that of Edgar and both subjected to the remorseless pressure of the elements, Lear's rapidly awakening 'social' awareness and the concern for 'justice' that accompanies it show signs of shading into something deeper, more universal. That 'poor Tom', who had formerly 'three suits to his back, six shirts to his body, horse to ride and weapon to wear', but is now 'whipped from tithing to tithing, and stock-punished, and imprisoned' is the reflection of a cruel and unstable social order, such as that which Lear himself

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has now learned to contemplate, is clear enough; but it is not the whole, or perhaps even the most important part of the picture. *King Lear* is a great tragedy precisely because it is a play about human 'nature' before being a play about the abuses of government or social inequality. It is this 'nature', indeed, that is now being revealed, exposed to the prevailing 'cold' and stripped for our consideration. The state of 'sophistication', through and beyond which Lear now sees, is more than the mere pride of position or the abuse of wealth. Both these things are, indeed, normal attributes of human nature, part of the conventional superstructure with which man seeks to hide even from himself his true nature, as normal in their own way as the garments which he owes to the brute creation and with which he protects his otherwise 'uncovered body' from the 'extremity of the skies'. Yet, normal though it be, this 'sophistication', unless balanced by a corresponding grasp of the true position of man, and so by a compensating humility, is an occasion of pride and evil—the evil, indeed, which has brought Lear himself to his present position. Fine clothes, and an unchecked desire for the power which they symbolize, are connected attributes of his 'unnatural' daughters; it is no accident that Lear, when he argues in favour of the apparently 'superfluous' claims even of the 'basest beggars' against his daughters' frigid conception of 'need', refers scathingly to the 'gorgeous' apparel which contrasts so sharply with their advocacy of austerity for others (II, iv). To this state of false pretension the action of the storm has come as a remedy. It has brought those exposed to it back once more to the familiar, but always forgotten truth, ceaselessly inculcated by the moralists and preachers of mediæval tradition, and by others before and after them, that 'unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal' as Edgar. This pitiable object is, by his own confession, a 'serving-man', at once a courtier 'proud in heart and mind' and a slave to his own passions, who has now learnt by bitter experience that it is a '*poor* heart' which betrays itself to 'women', to the transitory satisfactions of the flesh, only to find itself enveloped to the last—in accordance with Edgar's own repeated catch—in the prevailing cold.

The confronting of Lear with Edgar, however, although an important stage in the development of the main themes of the tragedy, is not an end in itself. It is the prelude to a still more important meeting in which the two parallel family histories with which *King Lear* is concerned are brought together and the two fathers whose behaviour has set them in motion finally confronted. The Fool, whose part in the action has grown less prominent as the number of characters and situations illuminating the various stages of Lear's madness increases, intervenes once more at this point with one of his most significant observations. The occasion is in part Lear's frenzied divesting of the 'lendings' which still differentiate him from elemental humanity, and in part the arrival on the scene of Gloucester, newly moved to compassion. Gloucester, whose own past behaviour in the begetting of Edmund is—like Lear's own—

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in the process of returning to him upon the whirlwind, has his own contribution to make to the general theme of passion which now concerns us. This is the meaning of the Fool's enigmatic greeting. Taking up the contrast, already developed by Edgar, between the brief fire of lust and the 'cold' which surrounds it, he is moved to see in the entry of Gloucester with 'a torch' a reflection of the fire of life blazing up briefly and ineffectively in the surrounding desolation: 'Now a little fire in a wild field were like an old lecher's heart, a small spark, all the rest on's body cold'. The 'old lecher' is clearly Gloucester himself and the 'little fire' the smouldering remains of the vitality which had formerly, in the days of his maturity, produced its 'unnatural' fruit in his illegitimate child. As a prelude to his meeting with Lear, the Fool's greeting serves to emphasize both the common, 'blood'-inspired source of their respective tragedies and the equally common helplessness with which they face it. Thus related in past behaviour, they are from now on envisaged in a common tragic destiny.

The entry of Gloucester, by thus focussing upon the second father of the play the general propositions about human nature advanced in Edgar's fictitious 'history', serves to bring together at this turning- point the two parallel threads with which the tragedy is principally concerned. Gloucester's approaching sufferings, indeed, make him at this stage a fit commentator upon Lear's fortunes. Lear's recent outburst—

> 't was this flesh begot
> Those pelican daughters—

is fitly balanced by Gloucester's own situation with regard to his children; and, though he does not yet realize that the past sin of his own flesh is turning against him, he can already relate the disorders in man's behaviour to a corruption, a flaw in the fleshly fabric of his nature—

> Our flesh and blood is grown so vile, my lord,
> That it doth hate what gets it,

and refer, in terms highly characteristic of this scene, to the son 'now outlaw'd from my blood'. In such utterances, the 'embossed carbuncle' in the 'corrupted blood'[5] is visibly working its way to the surface. At the same time, however, in Gloucester as in Lear, another development is simultaneously taking place. His new realization of what human nature may imply brings with it, at this very point, the beginnings of a saving reaction, a return to the natural concept of 'duty' which, in his own words, 'cannot suffer' to obey commands themselves unnatural. Edgar, in turn, touched more closely than ever by the appearance of his own father and aware of the full meaning of the tragedy which Gloucester is still unable to relate to his own situation, can only repeat his sense of the

[5]Act II, Scene iv.

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coldness that surrounds human helplessness: 'Poor Tom's a cold'. Once more the external, physical situation, conveyed through the words of one of those subjected to the tragic process, corresponds to the spiritual state of which it is the intimate reflection. It is Edgar's persistence in grasping the unadorned truth about the human situation that prompts Lear to hail him, at this very moment, as 'philosopher' and to enquire of him 'the cause of thunder', the cause, that is, if any there be, of the pitiless intervention of justice to which all the actors in this episode are equally exposed. The elemental disorder which produces the thunder has its own psychological counterpart in the dissolution of sanity, and the scene ends with Kent, in whom loyalty is the external manifestation of inner harmony, referring once more to the oncoming of Lear's madness—'His wits begin to unsettle'—and Gloucester's parallel admission of the state to which the 'outlawing' of Edgar has brought him: 'I am almost mad myself . . . The grief hath crazed my wits'.

In this way we are ready, at Lear's next appearance (III, vi), for the final break-down of his precarious sanity, which is also, by a paradox of fundamental importance in the structure of the play, his entry into true understanding. He is affected, of course, not only as father but as King. It is significant indeed, that in becoming conscious of his state he replies to the Fool's question, 'whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman', by replying 'a king, a king'. The dialogue between them at this point, indeed, emphasizes that the theme of personal lunacy has, at once its background and its projection, a counterpart in terms of social disorder. The inversion of the traditional categories of society, of the relationship between the yeoman and his son, the self-made 'gentleman', is seen in relation to the more fundamental inversion of the position of parent and child with which the whole tragedy is concerned; or the King, by conferring power irrationally and contrary to natural order upon his daughters, is in the position of a yeoman 'that has a gentleman to his son', it being 'a mad yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him'. As always the reproaches of the Fool are couched in terms of a cautious self-interest, but—as always, again—they refer beyond this to the reversal of a situation traditionally conceived as 'natural', proper to the normal construction of things, whose consequences are far from limited to loss of social and economic status. If the theme of the play is, in a sense, the reversal of natural order and its results, that reversal is given, here and elsewhere, a social illustration in terms of contemporary reality. Kent in the stocks, Edgar in disguise as 'poor Tom', and Lear excluded from his own hearth, are all victims of the ruthless exercise of the acquisitive instinct in its determination to break the bonds of 'nature' and custom in the free following of its own unlimited desire for power.

This point having been made, the scene passes on to what is rapidly coming to be the heart of the whole play's conception, the point to which the entire social and cosmic reversal of established values is leading—a consideration, in the most ample terms, of the nature of 'justice'. The execution of justice, indeed, is an essential

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part of the royal function, and Lear's torn mind when it recalls this fact is going back over the same range of responsibilities as once he had exercised to his own undoing. Now, with a complete reversal of the normal conventional values which, at the opening of the play, prompted him to embark upon a course of pretentious folly, the poor and the outcast, themselves seen as victims of an inadequate conception of justice and consequently exposed to the action of the tempest, are raised to the position of executing ministers. The naked Edgar, haunted by the 'foul fiend' he is now concerned to subdue, becomes in Lear's eyes 'thou robed man of justice', and the Fool, himself the living symbol of subjection to irresponsible power, his 'yoke-fellow of equity'; whilst those who have risen by their ruthlessness to the exercise of authority, who are—as we have seen—'gorgeously' clad, as indeed is the conventional judge in his robes, are now seen, stripped of their human pretensions and with their subsistent animality exposed, as so many 'she-foxes'.

Lear's situation at this stage, therefore, is one in which insanity and fresh vision stand in the closest relationship. The full meaning of this episode, however, is not limited to an inversion of the normal social categories. Behind the reversal of accepted human standards of justice there lies something even more fundamental, an insistent sense of the intractable, irreducible element of evil in human impulse with which justice itself has to deal. 'Let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?' It is this question, rather even than the extent of the personal disaster which has made it possible for him to pose it, that indicates the true extent of Lear's tragedy. A question less about the nature of justice or of its application to any particular situation than about human nature itself, it lies at the heart both of Lear's madness and of his possible redemption. The problem raised by it differs from even the most intricate of those with which the play has so far been concerned by admitting of no logical solution; it is, indeed, rather the realization of it than any such possible resolution, that gives its meaning to this particular moment in the play. It creates a state of spiritual tension so deep that the only possible transition from it is one into repose, sleep; and so it is at this point that Kent calls upon his exhausted master to 'lie here and rest awhile'. Lear's last phrase—'We'll to supper in the morning'—and the Fool's comment (his last word in the play) 'And I'll go to bed at noon', emphasize how complete is the reversal of normal appearances that has brought both of them at this, the play's point of balance, to their present state. To Lear's latest question the Fool, concerned only to reflect in his elliptic utterances the way of the world and to register in his own idiom the protest of unreasoning loyalty against its treatment of his master, has no answer to offer. At this moment, with Lear moved by the pressure of suffering to ask questions that transcend any conceivable particular situation, his function is complete. Having accompanied his master to the lowest point in his downward progress, he now leaves him.

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The last part of the scene, however, as befits a turning-point, contains features which look forward to the future development of the tragedy. Gloucester, in the first place, enters once more to warn Kent of the impending threat against Lear's life. By so doing, he confirms the step first tentatively taken at his previous meeting with the King, a step which means that he, like Lear, is now on the point of assuming, in a spirit of conscious acceptance, a full part in the developing tragic pattern. Hitherto a time-server and man of the world, he allows his human feeling to lead him into a course which involves the abandonment of his previous 'neutrality' and brings him, indeed, to exile, blindness and death but also to the possibility of spiritual redemption. Kent, for his part, makes his own contribution to the prevailing shift in emotional emphasis by stressing still more definitely the healing properties of sleep, thereby preparing the way, in terms of poetic symbolism, for Lear's eventual awakening in the presence of Cordelia:

> Oppressed nature sleeps.
> This rest might yet have balm'd thy broken sinews;

we are making at this point a first approach, later to be confirmed, to the spirit of *Macbeth*, in which sleep is regarded as a medicine for broken souls and as the handmaid of grace.

This first anticipation of a new spirit is finally confirmed at this point by Edgar. The rhyming sentences with which he brings the scene to an end express a new mood of acceptance which is to be characteristic of his future behaviour and of an attitude which comes, from now on, to play an increasing part in the development of the tragedy. Suffering, Edgar affirms, can bring with it a sense, dim but definite, of human solidarity in the face of disaster, whilst the contemplation of miseries even greater than one's own, especially in a King who embodies, as it were, a public as well as a merely personal destiny, is paradoxically a source of relief:

> Who alone suffers suffers most i' the mind,
> Leaving free things and happy shows behind:
> But then the mind much suffering doth o'erskip,
> When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.
> How light and portable my pain seems now,
> When that which makes me bend makes the king bow,
> He childed as I fathered.

Much of the central meaning of the play is here gathered up in an utterance whose rhymed artificiality is clearly calculated to give it the value of a comment, isolating it, in a certain sense, from the surrounding action. Lear is denied by his children and Edgar rejected by his father; from that central knot of opposed, but related situations, the whole play derives its structure. The effect of this relationship in misfortune, however, is not entirely negative. Edgar's own grief, that of a private individual, becomes more

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'portable' when related to that which 'makes the king bow'; by a strangely vital paradox it can even be regarded as 'light'. The reason for this paradox, in so far as it can be defined, derives in turn from the sense of interchangeable and related human destinies which underlies it; 'grief' becomes more supportable when it has 'mates' and when the normal human condition of 'bearing' (as Edgar has now come to see it, in the light of his own assimilation into the 'poor Tom' situation) is a sign of 'fellowship'. Finally, real as grief is in its call to leave behind 'free things', these in turn are seen, in the light of it, as 'happy *shows*', in a certain sense as delusions. The Stoic insistence upon freedom from external circumstances, though not the ultimate positive utterance of this play, is one of the elements without which that utterance would not be possible.

The following scene (III, vii), and the last of this crucial Act, represents the counterpart, in terms of the external action, of the point in Lear's progress reached in its predecessor. In it the full effects of the cruelty unleashed in human nature by passion are revealed in terms of physical suffering. For some time past we have been aware of the accumulation of imagery which compares the behaviour of human beings, acting under the impulse of unrestrained 'appetite', to that of fanged and devouring beasts. The wolf, the fox, and the lion have been constantly in the mouths of the protagonists, as symbols—so to speak—of the disruption of natural order and restraint. Side by side with these references have been others to sight, its relativity, and—by a moral parallel—its possible loss. The two lines of imagery now join, find objective manifestation in a terrifying action which represents, we can safely say, the lowest point of subjection to passionate cruelty reached by human nature even in this most uncompromising of tragedies. Gloucester, as a result of his concession to natural human feeling, is apprehended on the charge of treason, and Regan, Goneril, and Cornwall move round him with an intensity which is clearly inspired by 'blood' and which reaches its culminating point in the horrifying emphasis upon the blinding of their helpless victim. Characteristically, the words of Gloucester emphasize that this is a crime doubly unnatural because committed, not merely by man against man, but by guests against their host; equally characteristically, he ends, when he sees that his fate is decided, by denouncing the 'cruel nails' and 'boarish fangs' of his captors which would have been ready to pluck out Lear's 'poor old eyes' and to tear his 'annointed' flesh and which are prepared, in his absence, to turn upon Gloucester himself.

The preoccupation with sight, with eyes and their loss, which can be detected running through the earlier part of the play like a hidden thread, here comes to the surface in concrete dramatic form. As it does so, we realize more clearly than heretofore that this blinding incident has more than a factual meaning in the structure of the play. The physical suffering inflicted upon Gloucester, indeed, is almost intolerable, and only in relation to the vast conception of the whole tragedy, in which it forms a turning-point, can

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its inclusion be justified in artistic terms. For it is no accident that the moment in which Gloucester loses his sight, the victim of what seems to be, and is, a gratuitous act of evil, is also that in which the birth of his spiritual understanding is confirmed. This understanding is at once passively induced, a product of the action upon the old man of circumstances entirely beyond his control, and the result of a personal response to suffering. In the first place, Gloucester learns by experience that no evasion of the claims of human compassion, no reversal of the stand which normal feeling has induced him to take up, can save him. 'I am tied to the stake, and I must stand the course', he concludes, and in the light of this conclusion makes the only choice that is in fact open to him by asserting openly the necessity for pity. In the second place, no sooner is he blinded than he learns, by what is at once a last blow and a faint first illumination, of the treachery of Edmund. The realization is, of course, doubly poignant at this moment, and yet it is coupled, in Gloucester's own reaction, with the understanding of his own responsibility for the position in which he finds himself and with the knowledge, newly-dawned, that the true son of his own blood, whom he had believed a traitor, was in fact himself betrayed:

> O my follies! Then Edgar was abused.
> Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him!

These new developments are, indeed, the exteriorization of a central paradox, implied in Shakespeare's use of the image of sight. Those who 'see', who pride themselves on their clear-sighted appraisal of the world and its ways, find themselves betrayed by their sight, are in fact, in a very real and tragic sense, blind; whilst those who have lost their eyes may, in the very moment of losing them, receive a flash of moral illumination, in fact 'see'. The achievement by Gloucester of this kind of 'sight' at the moment of his blinding is perhaps the deepest and the most inclusive of all the paradoxical inversions employed in this Act to penetrate ever deeper into the realities of the human situation; it is an anticipation of practically every new element that will be introduced into what is left of the play.

There are signs, indeed, even before the end of this episode, that the paradox is beginning to bear fruit. Apparently small details of expression begin to point to such a development. It is certainly no accident that it is at this moment of almost intolerable physical and moral strain that the 'gods', hitherto embodied in the impersonal forces of the elements, acquire by implication a certain human connotation by being described as 'kind'; nor is it chance that the natural human feeling of the servants who accompany Cornwall, after having first borne a bloody fruit in the wounding of their master, affirms itself finally in a protest against what appears to be remorseless cruelty in the order of things. 'If she live long', one of them says of Regan—

> And in the end meet the old course of death,
> Women will all turn monsters.

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This is, at bottom, the reaction of normal humanity to a world in which natural human feelings appear to be on the point of complete dissolution, and in which the state of 'unaccommodated man'—with which the whole Act has been basically concerned—is merely that of the fox and wolf, the savage beast of prey, condemned to detroy until he himself meets destruction. The reaction appears, on a short-term view, to fail. The servant who wounded Cornwall is himself stabbed in the back by Regan, referred to as a 'slave' whose corpse is to be thrown upon the 'dunghill' by his master's orders. Yet the fact remains that Gloucester's sufferings have at last provoked a disinterested human gesture of pity, and that Cornwall himself has been mortally wounded. Although the very justice of the order of nature seems to be called in doubt by the horrors just witnessed, it is no accident that the last word of the scene and of this stage in the tragedy, entrusted to a humble servant moved once more by the spectacle of Gloucester's suffering, is 'heaven help him!' The very simplicity of the phrase, set against the intolerable savagery we have just witnessed, serves as a prologue to the developments to follow.

D. A. TRAVERSI.

[*To be concluded.*]

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

DYLAN THOMAS

COLLECTED POEMS, 1934-1952, by Dylan Thomas (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 12/6).

If Dylan Thomas has for some years now been the object of something of a cult, he has at length, to judge from the enthusiastic reception accorded to his last published volume, *Deaths and Entrances*, graduated to the status of a major, indeed a 'great' poet. But although it is now fairly usual for critics to speak of him in the same breath as Eliot, Auden, and Spender,—all four being, one gathers, equally 'great' poets—the kind of distinction commonly made between him and those writers is revealing and important. They, broadly speaking, are designated 'Classical', while Mr. Thomas, full of divine imperfection, is the ardent 'Romantic' rebel. A persistent note in the encomiums with which Mr. Thomas has been larded has been an insistence on what is generally described as his youthful 'spontaneity' and freshness of response to experience, unspoilt by too much of the 'intelligence' that has perhaps, it is tactfully suggested, made our modern poetical Renaissance rather

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one-sided; all this going miraculously, it would seem, with a sophisticated mastery of involved verse-forms. The resultant picture is something very like the old familiar one of the Genius, in the total complex of which, one might venture,—without any disrespectful feelings towards the country of the poet's origin—the idea of the Bard counts for not a little.

Both poet and publisher, it must be admitted, give the right kind of critic every encouragement in holding such a view. For good measure this new collected volume includes Augustus John's portrait of Mr. Thomas in what one takes to be a characteristic attitude of smouldering inspiration, and the poet's own prefatory note, with its gusty button-holing protestation of no-nonsense, is the very voice of incandescent Genius:

> 'I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon to protect his flocks, replied: "I'd be a damn' fool if I didn't!" These poems, with all their crudities, doubts and confusions, are written for the love of man and in praise of God, and I'd be a damn' fool if they weren't'.

Having thus disarmed criticism by implying that you are a rather inferior creature if you do not share his manly big-heartedness, the poet plunges into a breathless prologue in verse, 'intended as an address to my readers, the strangers':

> This day winding down now
> At God speeded summer's end
> In the torrent salmon sun,
> In my seashaken house
> On a breakneck of rocks
> Tangled with chirrup and fruit

Three words, 'torrent', 'breakneck', and 'tangled', may be detached and isolated as indicating the quality of the volume as a whole. Mr. Thomas is characteristically borne on a kind of Shelleyan 'aery surge', through a dazzling flood of image and sensation. To note this, of course, is not necessarily to make a serious charge; such idiosyncrasies may be canalized to serve a positive end, limited though the substance of poetic interest is likely to be. And it would, I think, be hard to deny that Mr. Thomas does in some measure possess a capacity for simple sensuous evocation which, without insistence on the evident dissimilarities, may be said faintly to resemble the lesser Hopkins of the 'nature' poetry. The opening of 'A Winter's Tale', quieter and more lucid than the staple of the verse in this collection, is a fair example of this manner at its best:

> It is a winter's tale
> That the snow blind twilight ferries over the lakes
> And floating fields from the farm in the cup of the vales,
> Gliding windless through the hand folded flakes,
> The pale breath of cattle at the stealthy sail,

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And the stars falling cold,
And the smell of hay in the snow, and the far owl
Warning among the folds, and the frozen hold
Flocked with the sheep white smoke of the farm house cowl
In the river wended vales where the tale was told.

Several criticisms promptly occur to one: the rhythmic flaccidity, the somewhat spineless and irritating repetition of 'and' with the consequent blurring of one image into another, the rather extraneous effect of 'hand folded'. But even when these points have been made, such writing, though not particularly distinguished, might justify one in attributing to the poet an agreeable minor talent—observe the clever concentration of suggestion in 'Flocked'—capable of possible useful exploitation within narrow and frankly accepted limits. The precarious success of these stanzas, however, is unfortunately not sustained. Hints of collapse implicit in the weaknesses just noted are only too surely realized, and before long the poem has modulated, or, more properly, 'lurched', into this kind of thing:

Look. And the dancers move
On the departed, snow bushed green, wanton in moon light
As a dust of pigeons. Exulting, the grave hooved
Horses, centaur dead, turn and tread the drenched white
Paddocks in the farms of birds. The dead oak walks for
love.

Relation of the stanza to its context imparts no felicity, symbolic or otherwise, to the wilderness of images. Failing to cohere, to build up together into any kind of overall, unified pattern, they consequently fail to make any forceful or even challenging impact.

It is customary for Mr. Thomas to begin a poem in full *furor poeticus*, but on the rare occasions when, as in 'A Winter's Tale', he sounds a more steady and considered note at the outset, he soon wrecks the balance by letting his undisciplined and uncritical fancy run away with him. The first stanza of 'On a Wedding Anniversary', for example, despite the histrionic gesture of the opening line, has some subtlety of phrasing and movement:

The sky is torn across
This ragged anniversary of two
Who moved for three years in tune
Down the long walks of their vows.

The concluding image of the third and final stanza, on the other hand, can only be described, at the most charitable, as hastily conceived and imperfectly grasped, though 'plain silly' might strike one as the more vividly suggestive term:

Too late in the wrong rain
They come together whom their love parted:
The windows pour into their heart
And the doors burn in their brain.

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Mr. Thomas's special mannerism, in fact, is just this habit of clutching at the apparently striking image that comes to hand, without a working-out of its implications or a proper consideration of its appropriateness. Violence is substituted for imaginative precision, as though in the hope that the force of the explosion may stun the reader's critical intelligence.

The Thomas enthusiast, of course, will affirm that this is the true fire, the apocalyptic visionary gift of the great poet, and will claim that failure to be impressed is the result of a one-sided estimate of the virtues of controlling critical vigilance in poetry. On the other hand, he will certainly defend Mr. Thomas against any suspicion of being a mere poet of intoxication, and will triumphantly point to his 'mastery' of complicated stanza-forms as evidence for the contrary. Nothing, indeed, is more odd about the cult of Mr. Thomas than the way in which his admirers alternately praise him now as the spontaneous, 'imperfect' genius, now as the wizard of technique. Such claims have been made for his architectonic skill that it is necessary to devote some special attention to this aspect of his work. If, as has been suggested, the opening of 'A Winter's Tale' faintly recalls the minor Hopkins, there are passages later in the poem that directly challenge comparison with the Hopkins of more distinguished achievement:

> Bird, he was brought low,
> Burning in the bride bed of love, in the whirl-
> Pool at the wanting centre,

By no amount of effort to penetrate the poet's intentions can I arrive at a satisfactory explanation of the splitting of the word 'whirlpool'. The conclusion seems to be that Mr. Thomas either has not understood the nature of such an effect as the split 'ling/ering', for instance, in Hopkins' 'No worst, there is none', or else sees in the drawn-out 'whirl/Pool' some esoteric felicity inaccessible to the uninitiated reader. The effect of the division would appear to be merely visual, doing nothing to control the tone and movement when one is reading aloud. A similar lack of connection between the disposition of the words in the stanza and the actual pauses and stresses one is obliged to make in order to read the poem intelligibly aloud, turns 'Poem in October', which might perhaps have been quite a pleasant minor success—the tone is not too hectic, and the 'apocalyptic' note is not overworked—into a depressing 'literary' exercise:

> A springful of larks in a rolling
> Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling
> Blackbirds and the sun of October
> Summery
> On the hill's shoulder,
> Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly
> Come in the morning where I wandered and listened
> To the rain wringing
> Wind blow cold
> In the wood faraway under me.

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That, to be sure, is not especially striking or original, but it has a certain lucid charm refreshing by comparison with this poet's normal heady wine. It is the more to be regretted, then, that Mr. Thomas did not permit his words to seek out and mould their own verse-structure, instead of stringing them brutally—for that, whatever the facts of composition, is the effect produced—across a pre-determined system of girders and scaffolding. An examination of 'Vision and Prayer' confirms one's suspicions that Mr. Thomas's preoccupation with 'form' is a concern with decoration rather than with poetry. The opening section, presumably 'Vision', is written in stanzas which billow out mathematically from a single word in the first line to a central line of six or seven words and then narrow down once more to the single isolated word, while 'Prayer' reverses the process. That, no doubt, looks very pretty, and perhaps one should be grateful to Mr. Thomas for making it clear by pictorial means, for one might well feel a trifle doubtful from a perusal of the words alone, which part of the poem is 'Vision' and which part 'Prayer'. But one is surely justified in asking for some precise guidance as to the writer's intentions. Does he, in fact, wish his poem to be read or simply to be looked at? If he claims the precedent of 'Easter Wings', one can only beg him to open his Herbert and think again. 'Easter Wings' is not one of Herbert's best poems, but the verse-structure is something more than a way of arranging words to make a picturesque symbolic design on paper.

The feeling informing 'Vision and Prayer', a kind of self-indulgent religiosity as grotesque as the verse-form, is characteristic of much of the later work in this volume. The poet's attitude to life, supposedly, has 'deepened'; or, in other words, a mess of quasi-Christian imagery has been thrown in to swell the broth. This religiosity may take the form of pompous unction, as in 'The Conversation of Prayer', of pseudo-liturgical verbal juggling, as in 'Ceremony after a Fire Raid', or, at its most offensive, of a downright disgusting self-righteousness:

> I shall not murder
> The mankind of her going with a grave truth
> Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
> With any further
> Elegy of innocence and youth.

The lines are taken from a poem entitled 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London'. Mr. Thomas was doubtless affected by the incident, and intended his poem to be a fitting and dignified expression of his reactions to it. The trouble is that the pronoun 'I', as in the body of his work, is much too conspicuous. But whereas one can tolerate this, however irritating it may be, when the basis of the poem is mere personal rhapsody, it becomes offensive in the extreme when the writer starts to pontificate on matters of common human feeling and suffering.

Mr. Thomas's art has not improved with the years. The early poems in the volume, though one could hardly call any one of them

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successful, have not that kind of gross pretentiousness. And although the imagery is no less tangled than that of the later work, it is not quite the same haphazard welter; Mr. Thomas is being less of a genius and more of a poet. If one finds the following lines strained and ineffective, one feels nonetheless that Mr. Thomas had some reasonably clear idea of what he was trying to do, even though the experiment did not come off:

> Where once the waters of your face
> Spun to my screws, your dry ghost blows,
> The dead turns up its eye;
> Where once the mermen through the ice
> Pushed up their hair, the dry wind steers
> Through salt and root and roe.

These earlier poems make at least a pretence of coherence, even though the effect is often really the result of a trick. 'A process in the weather of the heart' and 'The force that through the green fuse drives the flower', to take two instances, have the kind of spurious-logical structure of which Shelley's 'Music, when soft voices die' is the classic example.

Superior as they are, generally speaking, to the later productions, the early poems could hardly have given one much hope for the future. Only the strictest self-criticism and self-discipline could have led Mr. Thomas to put his exuberant verbal energies to effective poetic use. As it is, his progress has been swift, confident, and disastrous, though 'disastrous' may seem the wrong word to use in speaking of the career of a poet who, spurred on by general acclamation, may be expected to continue to exhibit his mastery of intricate verse-forms for years to come. A cult, in these days, becomes all too easily an institution. But the attitudes implicit in the widespread acceptance of Mr. Thomas as a major poet, in the kind of praise with which he has been garlanded, may well give one cause for alarm, may well strike one as potentially disastrous for the future of English poetry.

ROBIN MAYHEAD.

FRENCH POETRY

THE POETRY OF FRANCE, an anthology, with Introduction and Notes by Alan M. Boase (Methuen; pp. XCVII, 247—16/6).

ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN FRENCH POETRY, FROM BAUDELAIRE TO THE PRESENT DAY, by C. A. Hackett (Basil Blackwell; pp. XXXIX, 305—17/6).

CONTEMPORARY FRENCH POETRY, by Joseph Chiari, with a Foreword by T. S. Eliot (Manchester University Press; pp. XVI, 180—12/6).

Compiling an anthology of poetry, and particularly of modern poetry, must be a pleasurable occupation, though surely a distressing one. What reader has ever been content with anthologies

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compiled by others? For one's personal pleasure, the best anthology would no doubt be that which one would compile oneself, digging out from one's memory long-cherished pieces, and asserting the taste of one's later life; the result could be of little use to anybody else, unless it were confronted with other books compiled by other people. We lately had that kind of *'guerre des anthologies'* in France, when, within a few years, André Gide, Paul Eluard and Marcel Arland for example, produced theirs. Each of them, in excluding or including such and such a poet had more in view the design of rounding off the picture of his own literary personality, than that of drawing our attention to the relative importance of the poets he thus marked for consideration, or reconsideration. When the late Paul Eluard banned La Fontaine on the ground that his ethics were based on *'la raison du plus fort'*, we knew this had nothing to do with La Fontaine's real assets as a poet. But when André Gide added this nostalgic sentence to his preface: *'cette anthologie ne représenterait donc plus que le désuet bréviaire d'une génération qui s'en va'*, we became mournfully aware of our own limitations, and of the temporary eclipses to which poets must inevitably be submitted in the course of generations, before becoming 'classics'.

But the anthologies we are faced with in this review have been designed by academic minds, and composed with a high degree of seriousness. They mean to be useful tools in the hands of the student and of the general reader, as their carefully written prefaces and plentiful notes testify. A large—and well-deserved—space is therefore given to gilt-edge values which no one can dispute, though an effort has been made by both anthologists to avoid presenting pieces which have figured again and again in books of that kind. As for the rest, their preference goes to the poets and the poems which they think are most representative of a writer, a school or a period. The field covered varies in range with each of our anthologists, though it ends at the present day in both. Professor Boase's choice is more ambitious in scope, as it starts from the poetic revival supposedly brought about by André Chénier, whereas Professor Hackett, concerned as he is with contemporary poetry, is satisfied to find in Baudelaire if not the 'begetter', at least the all-inspiring source of the 'ensuing' poems.

André Chénier, no doubt, can provide us with a link between two epochs, the decadent, pseudo-classical period of the eighteenth century, in which rhetoric had reduced poetry to versifying, and the slowly in-coming revival of romanticism, which historians would have us believe burst about the 1820's. It would, indeed, be easy, as Professor Boase suggests, to rank Chénier's 'burning *Iambes* . . . alongside the D'Aubigné of *Les Tragiques* and the Hugo of *Les Châtiments*'. Chénier's phraseology, choice of words, and even his subjects (in spite of his *'sur des sujets nouveaux faisons des vers antiques'*), though not his rhythms, place him in the classical tradition: his novelty lies in the fervour of the *sentiment personnel* which inspires him. His true right to stand as the land-mark (if not the inspirer) of a new departure in poetry is there. Poetry will no

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longer be considered merely as an *exercice* to ennoble and to embellish any given object, idea or feeling, but as a genuine exertion of the poet to express ideas and feelings conceived or felt in the mind of man *à propos* of a given situation; to interpret, and possibly to modify, that situation. In other words, the function of poetry will radically change from what it has long been restricted to, namely *un divertissement de l'esprit et du coeur*—into something significant and valuable. With the Romantics, we turn from *la poésie concertante* to *la poésie militante*: there, I believe, lies the secret of a century and a half of astonishingly fruitful poetical adventures. Poets grew to a new awareness: that of being something more than mere *amuseurs* or *charmeurs*. They realized, even when they pretended later to isolate themselves in their ivory towers, or to write poetry for poetry's sake, that they could not in fact remain strangers to the human situation. Some assumed they were magi, or leaders of nations; some undertook to track human sensibility down to its inmost recesses, some endeavoured to solve metaphysical problems, some even wanted to invent a new language in order to expand the scope of their research or the power of their influence on contemporary life: all had in various degrees, according to their temperaments, (and even when they turned their backs on the century) the ambition to utter something which would go farther and deeper than what their predecessors had said. The historical perspective, winding though it may be, along which Professor Boase ambles down to the present day, offers remarkable examples of the pangs and throes of the restlessness of the century.

Professor Boase is clearly a very able and sensitive connoisseur, and his long-pursued studies on French Poetry of the most difficult kind (the 'metaphysicals' of the sixteenth century), have given him an eye to sample unerringly throughout the poetical field he is investigating, and have whetted his mind to an acute appreciation of the samples he has picked up for our information and delight. For our delight, the poems are there before us, significant (both for their meaning and their beauty), of the poet—and, for our instruction, Professor Boase has furnished us with a compact, stimulating preface and a complementary appendage of notes, in which he not only justifies his selection, but in no careless or colourless manner sets up a frame in which to insert his samples, and focusses on them the light of his interpretation. He thus plays the twofold part (sometimes difficult to reconcile) of an historian of literature and a critic. The historian guides the critic, and the critic enlightens the historian. What he really produces almost amounts to a theory of poetry, if not in doctrine, at least in an intelligent interpretation of the given facts, that is of the poems. The stress he lays on Hugo's hypnotic tendency (or '*magnificent courage*') to become a 'pilgrim of the abyss', and a hunter of Myths, is amply justified, and indeed—laying aside his rhetoric—it would give him the right to rank first—(in time as well as in scope, if not, perhaps, in depth) among the *poètes critiques* of the succeeding generation, as '*engagé*' as any of them, and, therefore, just as perceptive of the

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distressing problems which have tortured them. A return to Victor Hugo is effectively discernible nowadays, and that is not due purely to the recent *Victor Hugo avec nous* of the Communist Party, but to his glaring and, sometimes unfortunately trumpeting concern for the ever present antinomies of the destiny of man, a concern which his all-absorbing verbal and vocal powers had obscured for the exacting and diffident purists of the academic type. To approach Victor Hugo by his obsessions is therefore not more foolish than to approach Baudelaire or Rimbaud by theirs. The point is, however, to discover the right ones, and not to be obsessed in your turn.

Enough has been said, for example, of the struggle in Baudelaire between good and evil, and in Rimbaud between *le voyou* and *le voyant*, in Mallarmé between sense and sterility, and in Valéry between Apollo and Dionysus. Professor Boase very aptly approaches Baudelaire from a 'theoretical angle', Mallarmé from *la musicalité*, Rimbaud from the pragmatic technicalities of the *Lettre du Voyant*, and Valéry from the impressive tower of silence and observation from which the poet himself chose to prepare and to watch his painstaking victory over language and thought. In other words, Professor Boase's approach is decidedly that of a clear-sighted intellectual, who opens the way for his analysis with minute care, and forbids himself to be carried away by his enthusiasms or repulsions. He is, above all, a discoverer of latent symbolism, and never more at ease than when the matter in hand holds something complex and subtle to be disclosed. His comments on Mallarmé's famous *Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui*, are, to my knowledge, among the most illuminating I have ever read.

Coming to the contemporary period, one feels as if Professor Boase, after his review of the giants, was more concerned in finding sources of inspiration and detecting influences than appreciating modern poetry for what it is worth. Here, I am afraid, the historian takes precedence over the critic. Modern poetry (I do not think anyone will dispute that) actually begins with Apollinaire. There is more in him than the technical experimenter and the discoverer of *jeux savants* he is often said to be. A mere description of those will not do. His stature is growing from day to day, and even the recent publication of some of his undesirable *inédits* has not succeeded in endangering it. His 'adventure' is not to be explained away in two indifferent paragraphs, and he ought to have been (at least) linked up straight away with the subsequent 'adventures' of *Le mouvement Dada* and Surrealism, before the developments of which he well might, I agree, have found himself like a hen before a brood of ducklings. The 'negative' character of Dada had nevertheless the result of enforcing upon poets and public alike a reassessment of the function of poetry, which had thinned away in the fag-end of the symbolist school. True it is that neither Dada nor the Surrealists contrived to follow up their disturbing proclamations and manifestos with a poetical output of any magnitude. But they made it impossible to write after them as one had written before, or conversely they made it possible to escape the deadlock which threatened

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to sterilize French poetry after the 1918 armistice, by opening up innumerable fields of activity for the poet. Curiously enough, these revolutionaries, in their fury of self-assertion and originality, could not do without ancestors, and desperately aspired to link themselves up with a tradition of French poetry, which (apparently, so they said) had passed unnoticed, or, at least, needed to be looked at with fresh eyes. The quarrel with their age was not only a quarrel on the nature of inspiration or on the technique of image-finding. It went much deeper than that. If the symbolist revolution broke away (with Nerval and Baudelaire) from the oratorical trend of French poetry, Surrealism broke away from the farcical nonentities who pretend to pass current for poets or writers, and expounded its creed with a good deal of demolishing rigmarole. But they meant business. Their *fatrasserie*, dictation of the unconscious, oneiric delirium, *humour noir*, and so forth, may be fragmentary and inadequate means of reaching a genuine and coherent poetical expression, but they bear witness, among other things, to their determination to make all possible aspects of poetry incentives to life, and poetry itself the ever present justification of the universe. It is not a criticism of surrealism to say that Aragon produced his best poems when inspired by the resurgent patriotism of the occupation years, or that Eluard carefully distinguished 'between dreams, surrealist texts, and poems'. *Le Crève-coeur* or *Brocéliande* would not have been written without the newly-awakened awareness of the preceding years, and Eluard's simplicity of diction is the result of a cleansing of the soul which no conversion could have effected as efficaciously as did his former rebellion.

However that may be, it is clear that contemporary poetry in France looks much more like an intricate *maquis* than *un jardin à la française*, and I do not blame Professor Boase (taking into account the space he had reserved in his book for contemporary poets) for having sparingly and cautiously gathered his bunch of poems. One may regret a lack of proportion between Claudel and Péguy (the latter probably too rhetorical and 'litanic' for English ears), the absence of any war-poem of Apollinaire (among the finest he ever wrote—as his attitude to war was a curiously excited one, not juvenile, not 'chauvine', but courageous and resilient). And then, speaking of war-poems, I think *Richard II Quarante* (if, indeed, Aragon's *Crève-Coeur* should be represented) a much better instance than either *Enfer-les-Mines* (Professor Boase's choice) or *Les Lilas et les Roses* (Mr. Hackett's) of Aragon's lyrical powers. Again, why not Breton, Salmon, Reverdy, Desnos, Char or Guillevic among the younger generation, if one includes Jouve and Emmanuel? And among the forbears of surrealism, an extract, at least, should have been given of Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror*.

But the two anthologies under review complete each other, so to speak. The omissions just mentioned in Professor Boase's are partly repaired in Professor Hackett's, whose book is, as I said, dedicated to contemporary poetry. He also, being of the teaching profession, hankers after some logical explanation of the present chaos,

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and, starting from Baudelaire or Baudelaire's successors, discovers two branches of poetical expression, one of which reached 'its fulfilment and its end in Mallarmé and Valéry', whereas the other *'l'ordre du sentiment et de la sensation'*, developed 'into a strange off-shoot: the Dada movement'. Over-simplification is always a dangerous thing—yet it will perhaps be said in the near future that Valéry's painstaking and irreproachable poems *ferment la marche*, instead of opening new vistas. Will not his conception of poetry—in a man whose former adhesion to symbolism marked him for sensuousness and versatility—appear too exacting and too dry, with its nostalgia for unassailable intellectual perfection? Valéry's theorizing, if it justified the form of his poetry in his own eyes, prevented him from turning all the moving matter of his sensibility to poetical use, and singularly cramped his attitude towards his own poems—which he contemptuously called *'exercices'*. There was a time—very short indeed—when Paul Valéry's line of development skimmed off the rising meteor of Surrealism looming over the horizon. It was he—so it is said—who suggested the title *Littérature* (as an ironic antiphrase) for the revolutionary review of his surrealist friends.

But he could never be a fellow-traveller. He was too much of an aesthetician, not a moralist—and his philosophical bias was turning him to the past, not to the future. At bottom a pessimist, increasingly unsatisfied and increasingly desirous of filling the gap between two inadequacies: that of his own time to attain some degree of serenity of vision and thought, that of his own genius to retain the fleeting ecstasies which his all-embracing intelligence might have given him. He was too self-centred to espouse the quarrels of his own epoch, he could only look at them with the cold and sometimes resentful eye of the intellectual, and yet he despairingly tried to attain the knowledge which would strengthen his belief in man's right to existence. He stood by the side of the Sphinx, watching him, with no wistful eye, proposing riddles; he had a tenderness for Oedipus, but Oedipus had become the monster. His attitude was irrelevant before a tragically puzzling world which he could well understand and reduce to striking formulas; but it was, momentarily at least, doomed to defeat, though he himself resolved his own life in a spiritual triumph. The time will come, one hopes, when he will again be a living influence.

The whole current of poetry which was liberated by the Dada and Surrealist revolutions may indeed be said to belong to *'l'ordre du sentiment et de la sensation'*. But the formula is at once too narrow and too vague. It would be impossible, in any case, to enclose the indescribable in a formula. One thing, however, may be advanced: we are not to approach contemporary poetry from a purely aesthetic angle, that is with the touchstone of a theory of beauty. Nor are we to think of contemporary poetry in terms of 'experiments' only, though a number of to-day's poets would easily lend themselves to such a definition. Surrealism, when all is said, is more an attitude to life than a technique of writing poetry. Each poet has the right to look for his own technique within that attitude,

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and it is equally inevitable that a multiplicity of attitudes should be a function of the historical situation. Surrealism has released the possibility for each poet of inventing his own idiom, and of freely complying with his personal reactions. If there is, to-day, so much writing (rightly or wrongly) deviated from its true function towards what is called a 'metaphysical interpretation' of the place of man in the universe, and of the universe itself, there is nobody or nothing, to blame except the historical fact. But even metaphysics are to-day tainted with ethics. Poetry has suffered (or profited) like the rest (drama, the novel, essay-writing) in trying to clarify the present day's confusion. The dominant note—more than in any previous period of literature—is anguish (*l'angoisse*) before the disjunction between the spiritual and the material. 'A progressive impoverishment in our civilization' says Hackett—? I wonder. Surely not 'decadence'—and our poets are not writing away on their tablets, at the call of a metaphysical Caligula, who would be whistling them off the stage for the irrelevance of their songs. But we may be 'struck by their lack of depth and human significance', no doubt because of the dispersion of the efforts of their individual talents: the writing of great poetry probably requires more concentration and less turbulence, if indeed it is *'emotion recollected in tranquillity'*. Hackett very aptly quotes Reverdy: *'Non, un homme réellement en danger ne réagit pas en écrivain . . . Que le poète aille à la barricade, c'est bien—c'est mieux que bien—mais il ne peut aller à la barricade et chanter la barricade en même temps. Il faut qu'il chante avant ou après'*. What about concentration camps? The world has not yet been 'exorcized'.

Anyhow, Professor Hackett's book is thoroughly to be recommended. Unpretentious and comprehensive, his choice of poems is reasonably varied and sound, and his notes are reliable and helpful. I wish we had the English counterpart of either of these anthologies across the Channel.

The third book under review, Monsieur Joseph Chiari's *Contemporary French Poetry*, offers itself as 'a tentative interpretation of the poetry of some of the most remarkable modern French poets'. It covers the same ground, and deals, roughly speaking, with the same poets. It will be useful to read concurrently with the two prefaces just examined, be it only to note differences of approach and judgment. Monsieur Chiari being French, one would expect from him a more methodical survey and a deeper insight. But surprisingly enough (perhaps Monsieur Chiari wanted to surprise his reader) the author will concede nothing to logic, either chronological or otherwise. The placing of Supervielle before Surrealism is unorthodox enough, but the putting together of St. John Perse and Henri Michaux in the same chapter will surely confuse many readers. Looking at the list of contents makes one regret that Monsieur Chiari, who can be a very good analyst (his chapter on Valéry reads well and contains some solid remarks) has let the occasion pass of tying up the loosely connected studies he dedicates to one man, one school or one current of thought. Surely, whatever

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the disorder may be in French poetry to-day, he could have helped to make the picture more readable, especially for the English public. It is easy enough to say that 'poets defy even the vaguest classification'. They do, in a way—but then what service can the critic render, if not to disentagle originality out of apparent confusion?

Though Monsieur Chiari's intent avowedly is to let poets 'stand on their own', he does not spurn an occasional definition, analogy or sweeping statement, about which he might have been more precise or more cautious. It is somewhat startling, for example, to have Maurice Scève associated with Paul Eluard, the Kabbala, Rimbaud and Valéry. I would suggest Mallarmé as a missing link, and why not Raymond Queneau's *Petite Cosmogonie Portative*? Again, in what sense can we say that Racine 'is the most important influence in French poetry', or that 'Victor Hugo may have soared to greater heights than Valéry or Baudelaire?' Is poetry a question of soaring to great heights?

Many such assertions throughout the book prove irritating, because Monsieur Chiari consistently yields to the temptation of spoiling his developments with some imaginative formula or paradox which he takes no trouble to qualify. He wants to make too much of a good thing. The book is teeming with ideas, and, thus, may be said to be stimulating. But Monsieur Chiari's imaginative intensity will have to quieten down a little before we can fully trust his reliability as a critic.

HENRI FLUCHÈRE.

GREAT SIDNEY AND GREAT SHAKESPEARE

POETS ON FORTUNE'S HILL. Studies in Sidney, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher. By John F. Danby (*Faber*, 18/-).

In spite of its merits Mr. Danby's previous book, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature*, did not inspire confidence in him as a critic. The occasional shift of the weight of his interest from the dramatic poem itself (*King Lear*) to certain abstracted 'ideas', and the tendency to linger fondly over schema and formula, left one questioning whether his eye was so firmly on the object as the zestful intentness of the discussion suggested. Mostly, the present book is evidence that the incipient defect has become the debilitating major factor in Mr. Danby's criticism.

It is in a reprinted essay—the chapter entitled 'Antony and Cleopatra: A Shakespearian Adjustment',—that the book's best criticism is to be found. This chapter is unencumbered by the non-critical methods and anti-critical pre-occupations of those which surround it. And although, having read this far into the book, one cannot afford not to be suspicious when told that there is a 'deliberate logic', 'the logic of a peculiarly Shakespearian dialectic', in the play,

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the phrases turn out to be used justifiably: Mr. Danby develops his initial response to the play—a sense of the 'deliquescent reality' underlying 'the bewildering oscillations of scene, the overlapping and pleating of different times and places, the co-presence of opposed judgments, the innumerable opportunities for radical choice to intervene' (p. 132)—into careful formulations of what seem to him to be its 'themes'. Dissatisfied with both 'the Roman condemnation of the lovers' and 'the claim that there is a "redemption" motif in Antony and Cleopatra's love',—that this love is 'asserted as a "final value",'—he sees the fourth and fifth acts as 'the ends moved to by that process whereby things rot themselves with motion' (p. 148), demonstrates the omnipresence of this process, and concludes: 'It is the tragedy of the destruction of man, the creative spirit, in perverse war and insensate love—the two complementary and opposed halves of a discreating society' (p. 151). Although one may feel uneasy at the facility and definiteness with which Mr. Danby can offer this kind of formulation, his unified view of the play is not achieved by the deft manipulation of formulae: the conclusion evolves naturally from the examination.

Yet what this account lacks is a close and immediate responsiveness to the workings of the verse. There is little to suggest that Mr. Danby would have written a different essay had *Antony and Cleopatra* been written in prose. And his assessment of *Arcadia*—a detailed analysis prefaced, punctuated and concluded by, to say the least, not unfavourable comparative references to the mature Shakespeare—is uninhibited by the knowledge that Shakespeare wrote poetry. Early warning is given of the kind of criticism to be expected. After claiming—it is a claim well supported in the two chapters entitled 'Sidney's *Arcadia*: The Great House Romance', and 'Sidney and the Late-Shakespearian Romance'—that 'the elements of Romance and Pastoral in the *Arcadia* are not of primary importance', Mr. Danby continues:

> 'But as with Sidney, so with Shakespeare. The difference between Greene's *Pandosto* and *A Winter's Tale* is the difference a mature and practised philosophy makes. Sidney's *Arcadia*, too has the largeness of an "erected wit" . . .' (p. 48)

Coming across this in the normal course of reading through, one feels half-willing to give Mr. Danby the benefit of the doubt, to allow that his special concern, at that point, may justify the emphasis on 'a mature and practised philosophy'. But what follows is unequivocal in its confirmation of one's worst suspicions. He considers that the findings of his scrutiny entitle him to the assertion that 'Sidney or Shakespeare are the two giants of the Elizabethan scene: twin miracles, like Sidney's heroines, of choice and chance, of nurture and nature'[1] (p. 73). And although 'in their modes of reaching their conclusions, in their methods of presenting them, they are diametrically opposed', ('Nature takes the pen' from Shakespeare, whereas 'Sidney's is a declared consciousness in each field he enters',) their equal greatness is seen to consist in that 'They

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accept the same fundamental truths of the spirit and arrive at similar conclusions' (p. 72).

How firmly Mr. Danby believes that this kind of pronouncement is furthering the business of criticism, his method of examining *Arcadia* reveals. He is preoccupied with its 'pattern':

> 'It is of the seriousness of Sidney's "erected wit" that we are most aware in reading the *Arcadia*. Its pattern imposes itself throughout' (p. 48).

The preoccupation amounts to obsession, for, in the riveted fascination of its gaze it is incapable of the essential critical perception: that the themes and significances which are said to constitute the 'pattern' are present only as willed explicitnesses, the inanimate products of the consciously planning mind, the plotted lines of a 'thought-up' design skilfully arranged but inert. The 'significances' which are not concretely 'there' *have* no significance—the observation is elementary enough but it becomes embarrassingly necessary to make it. For although he can admit that Sidney is 'consciously the intellectual moralizer of his material', and appear to stress this difference 'in their modes . . . and methods . . .', Mr. Danby can also perform a kind of verbal sleight with Sidney's phrase: 'erected wit', whereby, using it first to indicate the creative power common (it is implied) to Sidney and Shakespeare, and then to refer to the creative source from which the 'pattern' of *Arcadia* (again, by implication) springs,[2] he effects an unobtrusive insertion of the notion that the kind of 'pattern' observable in *Arcadia* can be discussed in the same terms as can the themes concretely present in the poetry of a mature Shakespeare play. Shakespeare's 'literary gift', he feels, is 'similar' to Sidney's. (See the passage on p. 80 quoted below.) The terminology of critical appraisal is squandered on *Arcadia*, ('range', 'variety', 'depth of insight', etc.,) and it is suggested that a failure on the reader's part to trace the finer lines of the pattern, in all their complex inter-

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[1]Mr. Danby invokes the 'seventeenth-century' view of Shakespeare, and remarks that 'whereas Shakespeare expresses an Elizabethan humanity, Sidney expresses an Elizabethan education—and the disadvantages are not always with education' (p. 72). What Mr. Danby means by 'education' is suggested here: 'It is only when we see Amphialus that we can appreciate how raw an Elizabethan Shakespeare is—how distant he is from education in the real world of revolt and dynastic strain which Sidney knew from the inside' (p. 62). What essential education in these things, one asks, does the author of *Julius Caesar* show himself deficient in? The highly competent Home Office official has his own kind of 'education' in these matters, but it is not the kind which interests the literary critic.

[2]Both uses of the phrase are quoted above—in the two passages taken from page 48.

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sections, would be a failure of sensibility. What Mr. Danby's own performance, in examining particular passages, forcibly demonstrates, is that such a lapse would indicate not a defect of sensibility but a flagging interest in the hitherto absorbing game of hunt-the-acrostic. The examination yields nothing in the way of a serious challenge to Mr. Eliot's verdict: *Arcadia* is 'a monument of dullness'.

The elevation of Sidney to Shakespearian status is completed by means of a discourse on the body of wisdom they are said to share, the recognition accorded by both to the supremacy of certain moral abstractions. Thus 'Both *King Lear* and *Arcadia* are studies in Christian patience' (p. 72). Starting—the account runs—with the same acceptances, and arriving at the same conclusions, Sidney and Shakespeare differ 'in their modes of reaching' and 'methods of presenting' them. The supreme virtues of patience and magnanimity—the key-points of 'organization' in the Arcadian pattern—receive as distinguished treatment at Sidney's hands—the account continues—as at Shakespeare's, or Milton's—or Mr. Eliot's. Referring to the passage in which the three prisoners, Pamela, Philoclea and Zelmane are faced with the prospect of sudden death, Mr. Danby says: 'The spiritual experience, the intellectual lucidity, and the literary gift displayed in passages such as this remind us of those similar ones responsible for Cordelia, Samson, or St. Thomas refuting the Fourth Tempter' (p. 80). There is abundant evidence that Mr. Danby is telling the truth: he does *not* find any radical discriminations necessary. Great works of literary art result when the possessor of a 'literary gift' accepts the 'fundamental truths of the spirit'—that is how Mr. Danby sees it. Accordingly, the bible-commentator supplants the literary critic: on Edgar's

> the worst is not
> So long as we can say this is the worst,

Mr. Danby comments:

> 'The patience that can be complacent is not yet perfect. The sweets of positive charity and compassion have not yet been pressed from it'. (p. 123)

There is a great deal of this sort of thing in the book, and although it may be in place as marginal comment on the book of Job, it represents here a sinister degeneration of critical intelligence—sinister, because what is involved is another extension, to the literature of the past, of that kind of 'discrimination' which finds in Mr. Eliot's later poetry, (and in Mr. Auden's and in Charles Williams's) illustrated confirmation of its own 'beliefs'. *Arcadia*, indeed, appears to have become a rallying-point for what has been described as 'the most active and formidable of contemporary "gang-movements".' (F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit*, p. 254.) There have been signs that Dr. E. M. W. Tillyard's proposal, in *The Miltonic Setting*, to recruit *Arcadia* into the English Epic Tradition—he speaks of 'the unfailing vitality of its prose-rhythms', (p. 159)—portended a drive

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to exalt it into a living classic; signs also—to judge, for example, from a reference to the work in a recent *New Statesman* review of a Cambridge Elizabethan scholar's latest book—that Mr. Danby, in his association of scholarship with a particular religious interest, is not, in pursuing that end, unsupported.

The two preoccupations—with 'pattern' and moral abstractions—go together; where, as here, they are uppermost, they are incompatible—one is constantly provoked to insist on the obvious—with honest and disinterested criticism. Their dominance vitiates Mr. Danby's conception of Shakespeare's 'growth'. His references to 'the great positive tradition which comes down to the Elizabethan Everyman from the Middle Ages', 'the general Christian tradition of the West', and 'the moral scheme behind the whole of Shakespeare's work', remain mere references, for he fails to come to grips with the problem of defining the relation, to the 'tradition', of Shakespeare's 'individual talent'. Instead, the 'moral scheme' is visualized as 'a clearly mapped territory', in which to take a new direction is to agree, after all, with what the 'right-wise' of past ages have said.[3] It is left to the individual talent to contribute a lyrical dressing—and the job is done. Thus the plays of the last period become

> 'studies in patience rewarded. Shakespeare is turning from one part to another of a unified field' (p. 106).

And the occasional explicit concessions ('Shakespeare does have his growing-points', 'The vision is personal from one point of view') to the 'living presentation'[4] of Shakespeare, strike one as little more than lip service, so firmly held does Mr. Danby show his defective notions of growth and continuity to be.

The champion of *Arcadia* intends, of course, no irony, when he asserts that the last plays 'give us a schema for life, rather than life itself', (p. 107) and that in them 'formula, and schema, and intelligent manipulation are the dominant things' (p. 106). The 'studies in patience rewarded' are the work of a Shakespeare who 'has all the answers', 'is no longer worried'; 'not only are things

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3 'Boethius . . . like Perdita . . . knows that
'affliction may subdue the cheek
'But not take in the mind',

and, like Prospero, that Fortune is, to the right-wise, 'now my good Lady' ' p. 81).

There is a great deal of this sort of thing. With reference to Gloucester in *Lear*, Act IV, it is said: ' . . . charity works in the afflicted man, as Coverdale says it will' (p. 124).

4 What is disturbing is that although Mr. Danby recognizes that, in some way denied to Sidney, Shakespeare's is a 'living presentation', (tell-tale phrase) the recognition makes no major difference to his placing judgments.

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clear, they are almost cut and dried'. The dramatist who has attained his 'completest insight' in *King Lear* now turns to the philosophy and substance of Romance literature; he 'adopts' Sidney's 'scheme'—'an inclusive set of answers to carefully prepared questions'. There *is* continuity, but it is 'moral': '. . . the link between the tragedy of *King Lear*, and the romance of *Pericles* is patience and what patience implies'.

Perhaps the best way of expressing one's reaction to this view of the late plays is to record a feeling of relief—relief that Mr. Danby confines his attention to *Pericles*. For it is plain that only the radical defect noted above—the incapacity for direct and sensitive response to the local effects of the poetry as these give life to 'plot', 'character' and so on—could have made it possible to describe *The Winter's Tale* as 'a study in patience rewarded', 'a schema for life rather than life itself',—possible to say that the bitter division of the opening and the hard-won reconciliation and harmonizing of experience are the work of a 'no longer worried' Shakespeare who 'knows all the answers' and has 'things almost cut and dried'. There is every indication that Mr. Danby would have found no more 'significance' in Hermione's 'resurrection' than he finds in that of Basilius.

But concerning 'imagery' and 'metaphor-hunting' and 'verbal texture' he has warnings to issue. He considers—in defending Beaumont and Fletcher's plays—that:

> 'Our indifference to the poetry of Sidney, Spenser and Jonson, with its accompanying exaltation of Donne, Herbert and Marvell, may eventually be recognized as a by-product of Mr. T. S. Eliot's personal pamphleteering for what—even in him—was to be merely a chapter in his own poetic development. In any case, the absence of 'verbal texture' in Beaumont and Fletcher's verse is not decisive (p. 180).

Mr. Danby must speak for his own indifferences. But what is to be noted here is that he can discard the judgment that 'The blossoms of Beaumont and Fletcher's imagination draw no sustenance from the soil, but are cut and slightly withered flowers stuck into sand' (T. S. Eliot, 'Ben Jonson', *Elizabethan Essays*, p. 78)—discard it as not to the point. The point is that the verse

> 'passes through the filters of verbal analysis. It displays no variegated sensibility. It has no local knottings of thought and feeling. The knots are tied, in Beaumont's case, by *situation*' (p. 201).

This is characteristic of Mr. Danby's critical prose: it exhibits the lack of precision, the slovenliness which can content itself with the juggling of 'counters' and abstractions. No-one for whom the phrase 'local knottings of thought and feeling' was a pointer—a gesture recalling attention—to particular poetic effects, could have appropriated 'knots' in that way. And familiarity with the way in which

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in a mature Shakespeare play, these effects work in with each other to give life to what, in abstracting them, the critic names 'episode', 'symbol' and so on, would have warned him that the readiness with which the 'situations' of *Philaster* and *The Maid's Tragedy* seem to offer themselves in isolation from the verse, to break off and come away in the hand, is an index, not of their localizing, organizing power, but of the lack of an inner pressure of emotion.[5] But Mr. Danby's ingenuity—he finds that, as Shakespeare's mature plays have the unity of extended metaphor, so these have the unity of the 'extended conceit',—leads him to the conclusion that these plays are unities, though their unity is 'schizophrenic'. The indulged ingenuity and the consequent perversity of judgment are, again, characteristic.

In the chapters on Beaumont and Fletcher, as in the first chapter, the sociological preoccupation, which is insistent enough throughout the various 'studies' to justify the attention drawn to it by the title[6] and 'prologue', issues in some illuminating remarks on the position of the 'writer' in Jacobean society, and the ways in which the changing relations of Court and Great House affected it. But the discussion on the extent to which Beaumont and Fletcher may be said to be 'conscious analysts', on the one hand, and 'unconscious symptoms' on the other, of 'a particular human plight', is bedevilled by Mr. Danby's over-estimate of their plays; they are credited with a control and a unifying vision which are not theirs. As he recognizes, the value of his study of 'social place' rests on his ability to bring his findings into relation with 'the essential quality of the work itself' (p. 18)—on his performance as critic.

Mr. Danby speaks, in his prologue, of his desire 'tentatively to explore . . .' It has to be said that there is little in the book which answers to the description: tentative exploration. His intelligence is not 'free', not 'wholly devoted to inquiry'.[7] The few remaining sparks of life (there is a certain freshness in some of his critical observations, dotted about the book) are likely to be smothered by the pre-occupation with 'fixed ideas'. And although he not infrequently pays court to the 'living', it seems that no sense of the difference between that which quickens and that which deadens is to be allowed to modify his critical judgments. His interest in literature is no longer that of the literary critic.

J. C. F. LITTLEWOOD.

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[5]Although he can say: 'The psychology (of the situations) is that of a blind compulsion to be certain and to be convinced' (p. 165) Mr. Danby does not develop the implication: the emotion is faked.

[6]The hill of Fortune is described by the 'Poet' in *Timon of Athens*. For Mr. Danby's purposes the hill is 'to provide a kind of model of Elizabethan society'.

[7]T. S. Eliot, 'The Perfect Critic', *The Sacred Wood*, p. 12.

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